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THE BEGINNING OF A SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH

A Study of the Implications of the Pneumatology for the Ecclesiology
in John Calvin's Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles

THEOLOGISCHE UNIVERSITEIT VAN DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN
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in John Calvin's Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles**

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It was somewhere in the (South African) winter of 2007 that I arrived in Bloemfontein for a small symposium on John Calvin. I was late, the campus of the University of the Free State was dark and deserted already, and I entered the lecture hall just as proceedings for the evening were being wrapped up. I was welcomed by Dolf Britz, then professor of Church History at UFS. With his back to me, and in deep discussion (as he always seems to be), was Victor d'Assonville, now rector of the Reformatorisch-Theologisches Seminar (Heidelberg, Germany), whom I had not met before. Over the following days – and years, I might add – these two were the ones that introduced me to John Calvin, constantly reminding young scholars like myself not to read *about* Calvin, but to read him firsthand. This very practical way of introducing the distinction between primary and secondary sources was determinative for my studies in the years to come. I thank them for bringing me into the fold of Calvin-studies, as well as for their continued encouragement.

The duo became a trio when these two mentors (who also became friends) visited our house in 2009 together with prof. Erik de Boer. Here we first discussed the possibility of me starting a doctoral program, with prof. De Boer becoming my supervisor. However, due to the work in the congregation where I served at that time, as well as maybe some uncertainty of how and where to start this substantial project, I was initially slow to get going. This prompted prof. De Boer to write me a letter, quietly admonishing me and urging me to consciously set aside time for this study. His letter was characteristic of the pastoral way in which he guided me through this process, always showing concern for my family, my wife and the ministry. The other characteristic that stood out for me – the limited length of this preface does not allow me to mention more – was his creative way of ‘doing church history’. He was, and still is, constantly thinking outside of the narrow historical enclosure, looking for links between persons and events where most people won’t see any links, and discovering fascinating data by just digging that little bit deeper. Although we have seen one another face to face only a handful of times during the time of my doctoral studies, it’s been a privilege and a pleasure working under him. I want to thank him deeply for his care and inspiration.

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As I say in the final paragraph of the Introduction, this study was born from the ministry. True, it is an academic study, but it is rooted in the everyday life of faith and the church. This is where my parents, my in-laws, friends, colleagues, and the body of fellow believers have played such a crucial role in my life and, to a degree, also in shaping the topic of this study. Their support – morally, financially and otherwise – has been invaluable. The life of faith and the church is also the context where my wife, Tineke, and our four children (Júhan, Klarize, Henri and Etienne) have served with me faithfully. They have put up with my Calvin-studies, although sometimes with raised eyebrows from the side of the older kids. Once, when our son

had to pick a biography of a famous person from the school library, he chose Thea van Halsema's "This was John Calvin". He was destined to make this choice, as Calvin's was probably the only name he recognized among the other biographies. Nonetheless, I want to deeply thank Tineke and the kids for their patience and support throughout these years. You have been wonderful! But, above all, in the life of faith and the church we meet our Triune God, the one who bought his church with the blood of his Son, and sustains her through his Spirit. If this study is not primarily aimed at understanding and believing that reality, it has missed its goal. However, I am fully convinced that this was, in fact, the aim of this study, and that we can and should learn from Calvin in this regard. Whether I have succeeded in realizing this aim? Well, that is a wholly different question, which I leave up to you, the reader.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary theological context

Before looking into the more distant past of the sixteenth century, which will be the actual focus of this study, we start our story in the middle of the twentieth century with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the most significant event in the modern era of the Roman Catholic Church. Vatican II, as it is popularly called, presented itself as an ideal starting point for setting the context for this study. The Council and its constitutions have, after all, received a lot of attention in contemporary ecclesiology. And, even more important, it offers a valuable connection to the ecclesiology of the Council of Trent and John Calvin's reaction to it, as well as to the anti-Papal focus of the work under discussion in this study, Calvin's commentary on the book of Acts.

The ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, as summarized in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, revealed a spirituality that was at once a continuation and a discontinuation of earlier developments.¹ The decades preceding the Council were marked by a movement that opposed the legalization and externalization of the church and found its strength in the thought of the mystical body of Christ, preferring to focus on the supernatural, invisible and mystical reality in communion with Christ. *Lumen Gentium* took over this thought, and developed it even further with the biblical image of the church as the people of God.² In this sense the ecclesiology of the Council was a continuation and development of earlier trends and thoughts. However, this new ecclesiological drive of the decades preceding the Council did not come without resistance. Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* of June 29, 1943, was meant to warn against the dangers of one-sidedness in the aforementioned thinking about the mystical body of Christ. The mystical body should never be isolated from the concrete and visible church in her authoritative and hierarchical form. The Council, without denying the

¹ For more on the ecclesiology of Vatican II, see e.g. G.C. Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1964), 217-273; J. Ratzinger, 'The Ecclesiology of Vatican II', accessed April 19, 2016, www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDFECCV2.HTM; J.A. Komonchak, 'Ecclesiology of Vatican II', accessed April 19, 2016, <http://publicaffairs.cua.edu/RDSpeeches/99Ecclesiology.cfm>; M. Ouellet, 'Communio. The Key to Vatican II's Ecclesiology', accessed April 19, 2016, <file:///Users/user/Downloads/Communio%20The%20Key%20to%20Vatican%20II's%20Ecclesiology.pdf>. For a specific discussion of Calvin's ecclesiology in connection with Vatican II, see A. Ganoczy, *Calvin und Vaticanum II* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1965); A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans: Dienende Kirche und Kirchlicher Dienst bei Calvin* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1968).

² Since the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 the ecclesiology of Vatican II has been interpreted as communion, see M. Ouellet, 'Communio. The Key to Vatican II's Ecclesiology'.

validity of this warning, nonetheless continued the movement of the preceding decades in searching for new ways to express the true nature of the church. In this sense it was a discontinuation of the position of the pre-Vatican II pope.³

The church as the mystical body of Christ and as the people of God – although Biblically well known, these images were at that time experienced as radically new ways of looking at the church, and were met with great enthusiasm. The image of the body was used to describe the aspect of ‘belonging’, and was closely connected with the concept of the Eucharist in which the Lord is bodily present. With the image of the people of God the Council wanted to convey something of the fact that the church is still *en route*. Strong emphasis was therefore put on the ecumenical as well as the eschatological aspects of this image – the ecumenical aspect, among other things, allowed for non-Catholic Christians to be considered part of the people of God, while the eschatological aspect emphasized that the church has not yet reached her goal.⁴

One of the major contributors to the Council was the French Dominican friar, theologian and cardinal, Yves Marie-Joseph Congar (1904-1995). Although contributing substantially to *Lumen Gentium*, Congar believed that the Council had only gone halfway in its ecclesiological formulation.⁵ This had everything to do with Congar’s growing pneumatological understanding of the church. The late-19th and early-20th century Catholic theology had paid almost no attention to Pneumatology in ecclesiology. Of course, the Spirit was discussed in terms of his personal indwelling in believers, but seldom was this connected to a systematic ecclesiology.⁶ Congar would write that these were “years of famine”, in which “spiritual anthropology now seems to have been drawn off from ecclesiology.”⁷ It is therefore not surprising that Congar was captivated by the comment, made by two Orthodox theologians, that if they (i.e. the Orthodox) were to prepare a treatise *De Ecclesia*, they would only draft two chapters: one on the Holy Spirit and one on Christian anthropology. This they said in the context of a discussion on the proceedings of the Council in October 1963, just as the constitution on the church was being prepared.⁸ This comment reflects the basic criticism of Orthodox theologians on the ecclesiology of Vatican II: Pneumatology was neglected, and

³ G.C. Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie*, 217-221.

⁴ J. Ratzinger, ‘The Ecclesiology of Vatican II’; see also G.C. Berkouwer, *Vatikaans Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie*, 221-229.

⁵ E.T. Groppe, ‘The Contribution of Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit’, *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 477, note 118.

⁶ E.T. Groppe, ‘The Contribution of Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit’, 452-454.

⁷ Y.M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay*, transl. M. Naseby and T. Rainborough (London: Burns and Oates, 1966), 397.

⁸ E.T. Groppe, ‘The Contribution of Yves Congar’s Theology of the Holy Spirit’, 456.

“the Holy Spirit was brought into ecclesiology *after* the edifice of the church was constructed with Christological material alone.”⁹

This, however, is not only an Orthodox criticism. It is true that Orthodox theologians have traditionally put a lot of emphasis on the Pneumatology within the locus of the ecclesiology, but they are part of a growing drive for a pneumatological ecclesiology that has proponents across the confessional spectrum. Yves Congar (Roman Catholic), John Zizioulas (Orthodox) and Miroslav Volf (Protestant) are just samples of the breadth of the quest for an ecclesiology that does not only do justice to the Ignatian rule, *ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia*, but also honors the Irenaeus rule, *ubi Spiritus Dei, illic ecclesia, et omnis gratia*.¹⁰ Yves Congar passed away in 1995, but Zizioulas and Volf are still active and engaged in this theological debate. It might, therefore, be worthwhile to pause for a brief moment and get a feel for how they understand a pneumatological ecclesiology to look like. This is not meant to give an in-depth analysis of the debate or its respective proponents, but it will give a broad overview and in that way set the stage for the main question of this study.

For John Zizioulas¹¹ the question of the relation of Pneumatology and ecclesiology should start with the question of the relation between Pneumatology and Christology. What are the distinctive characteristics of the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit? It is distinctive of the Son that he became history. Although the Father and the Spirit are involved in history, the Christ event is the only one that assumed history and has a history. The Spirit, on the other hand, is the *beyond* history; he brings into history the last days, the *eschaton*. He makes Christ into an eschatological being, the last Adam. Thus, Pneumatology is firstly eschatological. The second characteristic of the work of the Spirit is that it gives Christ a ‘corporate personality’, so that Christ is not one but many. This introduces the concept of ‘communion’, whereby Christ is not alone but has a body, the church.¹² For Zizioulas eschatology and communion are

⁹ J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 123. See also C.E. Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 187-190. J. Ratzinger, ‘The Ecclesiology of Vatican II’ confirms the Christological emphasis of *Lumen Gentium* when he says: “If we were to ask ourselves what element present from the very beginning could still be found in Vatican II, our answer would be: the Christological definition of the church... the fundamental text on the church begins with the words: *Lumen gentium cum sit Christus*: ‘since Christ is the Light of the World ... the church is a mirror of his glory; she reflects his splendor.’ If we want to understand the Second Vatican Council correctly, we must always go back to this opening statement.” However, A. Ganoczy, *Calvin und Vaticanum II*, 28, is of the opinion that this criticism, namely that the work of the Spirit in the ecclesiology of Vatican II has not been sufficiently accounted for, is not justified.

¹⁰ M. Volf and M. Lee, ‘The Spirit and the Church’, *The Conrad Grebel Review* 18, no. 3 (2000): 22.

¹¹ For this short overview I used Zizioulas’ chapter ‘Christ, the Spirit and the Church’, in *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 123-142.

¹² See also footnote 2 in this chapter.

the two most important, though not the only, characteristics of Pneumatology, especially when it pertains to ecclesiology. And these aspects are not merely later additions to a church that has already been in existence. To the contrary, Pneumatology – and the aspects of eschatology and communion in particular – determines the very being of the church. The Spirit brings the church into being.¹³

Zizioulas subsequently applies these two characteristics (eschatology and communion) to four aspects of ecclesiology. Firstly, he highlights the importance of local churches in ecclesiology. With this he means that there is no priority of the universal church over the local churches, as if the former is the essence of the church while the latter are merely part of its existence. If Pneumatology is constitutive of Christology and ecclesiology, then the local churches are as essential as the universal church. There is not priority of one over the other, but they exist simultaneously through the one Eucharist. Secondly, and connected to the first, Zizioulas discusses the significance of conciliarity. The many local churches in a province cannot do anything without the one bishop, but in turn the one bishop cannot do anything without the many bishops (meeting in the synod). As Christ cannot be thought of without his body, so in ecclesiology the one cannot be thought of without the many, and this becomes visible in the council. Communion as ontological category in ecclesiology provides the theological grounds for conciliarity. Thirdly, also in the local church the one (the bishop) cannot exist without the many (the other ministries and the laity), and vice versa. This means, on the one hand, that there can be no ordination of a bishop without a community. On the other hand there can be no baptism or ordination of any kind without the bishop. And fourthly, in a pneumatological ecclesiology the church has an iconic function, reflecting the coming kingdom. The church does not find her certainty in history, but is placed between history and eschatology, between the already and not yet.¹⁴ In these very concrete ways Zizioulas envisions an ecclesiology that is pneumatologically determined.

Miroslav Volf¹⁵ follows the basic idea of Catholic theologian Heribert Mühlen, who proposed an ecclesiology whose foundation was Christ as both bearer and giver of the Spirit. Instead of

¹³ J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 129-132.

¹⁴ J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 132-138.

¹⁵ I will make use of M. Volf and M. Lee, 'The Spirit and the Church', *The Conrad Grebel Review* 18, no. 3 (2000): 20-45. It should be noted that Volf writes this article together with Maurice Lee, graduate student in Theology at Yale University. For more on Volf's ecclesiology, see M. Volf, *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), as well as a discussion of it by G. van den Brink, 'Trinitarian Ecclesiology and the Search for Unity. A Reformed Reading of Miroslav Volf', in *The Unity of the Church. A Theological State of the Art and Beyond*, ed. E. van der Borgh [Studies in Reformed Theology, vol. 18] (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2010), 313-326.

viewing the church as an ongoing incarnation, the church should rather be seen as the continuation of Christ's anointing by the Spirit.¹⁶ Volf, just as Zizioulas before him, starts with the relation between the Spirit and Christ. Christ, during his mission on earth, was very conscious of the power of God's Spirit at work in him. The Spirit's role, especially with regards to the church, was to constitute the freedom in which grace could function and in which wholeness, community and life could be restored.¹⁷ Seeing that the church is the continuation of Christ's anointing by the Spirit, the church should reflect something similar. In the power of the same Spirit the church is engaged in Christ's very own mission, representing him and accompanied by him. The Spirit secures the proper interplay between Christ's and the church's identity and mission.¹⁸

All of this determines the nature of the church. The church is, firstly, a gathering of diverse people, who have all been moved by the Spirit to believe in Christ as Savior and follow him as Lord. The church is, furthermore, a gifted community, gifted by the Spirit of ministerial diversity although remaining one body. The church is, thirdly, a community of love that is generated by the Spirit of freedom. And, fourthly, in this way the church reflects – in catholicity, equality and love – the life within the Trinity.¹⁹

The nature of the church also determines its mission. The church should be a sign of the coming reign of the triune God, whereby she continues the mission of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. This manifests itself in the church's proclamation of justification by grace, in the reconciliation of people, and in the care of the material world by addressing social and ecological issues. All of this is done in the power of the Spirit.²⁰

This short overview is sufficient to prove the conscious effort made by respected contemporary theologians to show that Pneumatology is not merely an added element to ecclesiology, but that the latter is ontologically determined by the former. Spirit and church are deliberately and systematically related, and the practical implications of this relation are worked out in detail.

¹⁶ M. Volf and M. Lee, 'The Spirit and the Church', 22.

¹⁷ M. Volf and M. Lee, 'The Spirit and the Church', 23-26.

¹⁸ M. Volf and M. Lee, 'The Spirit and the Church', 27-29.

¹⁹ M. Volf and M. Lee, 'The Spirit and the Church', 29-35.

²⁰ M. Volf and M. Lee, 'The Spirit and the Church', 35-40.

Question of this study

It is within this contemporary theological context that the question of this study has its relevance: *What is the significance of Pentecost and the consequent work of the Holy Spirit for the formation and restoration of the church in Calvin's commentary on the book of Acts?*

Interestingly, in their article Volf and Lee explicitly mention John Calvin as an example of the fact that theologians have reflected very little on how exactly 'Spirit' and 'church' are related. In their opinion this lack of reflection is a reality, notwithstanding the fact that the account of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost paradigmatically attests that the church was born out of the womb of the Spirit. Quoting from the Institutes 4.1.2, Volf and Lee say that Calvin "does not venture to explore how the Spirit of the triune God shapes the nature and mission of the church."²¹

Even if this last statement would be true for the Institutes, something that is stated rather than proven by the aforementioned authors, it is not yet a forgone conclusion that it is also true with regards to Calvin's other writings (e.g. commentaries, sermons, polemical tracts and letters). It has become commonplace in recent Calvin research not only to use the Institutes for Calvin's view on a specific *locus* or several *loci* combined, but to also use his other writings, in particular his commentaries.²² Moreover, it is today also generally accepted that Calvin's Institutes should be read in the light of the commentaries.²³ It remains, therefore, to be seen whether Volf and Lee's use of Calvin as an example of a lack of reflection on the relation between the Spirit and the church, is justified. The question of this study, therefore, has direct relevance for the contemporary theological discussion (Pneumatology and ecclesiology, and their relationship), while also taking into account trends in current Calvin scholarship.

²¹ M. Volf and M. Lee, 'The Spirit and the Church', 20.

²² See e.g. P.J. Wilcox, 'The Restoration of the Church in Calvin's Commentaries in Isaiah the Prophet', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 85 (1994): 68-95; H.J. Selderhuis, *God in het Midden. Calvijn's Theologie van de Psalmen* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2000), who studies the doctrine of God from Calvin's commentary on the Psalms; E.A. de Boer, *John Calvin on the Visions of Ezekiel: Historical and Hermeneutical Studies in John Calvin's 'Sermon Inédits', Especially on Ezek. 36-48* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2004); M.A. van den Berg, *Het Rijk van Christus als Historische Realiteit. Calvijn's Anti-apocalyptische Uitleg van het Boek Daniël* (Apeldoorn: Uitgeverij De Banier, 2008); F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody: the Church, a History of Divine Protection* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), who studies Calvin's ecclesiology from his commentary on the Minor Prophets; H. Dae-Woo, 'God's Creation in Calvin's Commentary on Genesis and in Capito's *Hexameron Dei opus*', in *Calvinus clarissimus theologus. Papers of the Tenth International Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis [Reformed Historical Theology, vol. 18] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 286-300.

²³ R.A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin. Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 116; see also D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19; E.A. McKee, 'Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin's *Institutio*: A Methodological Suggestion', in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, ed. E.A. McKee and B.G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 154-156.

This study within current Calvin scholarship

This study will research Calvin's ecclesiology from the limited scope of his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles²⁴, especially where his ecclesiology intersects with his Pneumatology. The claim made by F.A.V. Harms in the introduction to his study, namely that "no singular study of Calvin's ecclesiology has yet appeared that is based exclusively on one or more of the reformer's biblical commentaries", is not mine to make anymore. However, this study, based on a commentary on a New Testament book (the Acts of the Apostles), can be a valuable addition to and continuation of his study on the same topic, based on a commentary on a series of Old Testament books (the Minor Prophets).²⁵

Moreover, the unique place of the book of Acts in the history of God's dealing with his people sheds a very particular light on this topic. After all, the book of Acts contains the important event of the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and it would therefore be interesting to see how Calvin views the church that lived in such close proximity to this profound event. If the church is indeed born out of the womb of the Spirit of Pentecost, as Volf and Lee claim, then we are finding ourselves as it were in the delivery room, being able to observe both mother and child very closely, when we study Calvin's ecclesiology from his commentary on Acts. In line with the image of birth, it is therefore worthy to note at this early stage already that Calvin – and others, like Erasmus – has a predilection to use the image of the newborn church in his commentary on Acts. Clearly he realized that Pentecost brought something new with regards to the church.

Calvin's work on the book of Acts has received strikingly little attention from Calvin scholars. Apart from W.H.Th. Moehn's study on Calvin's sermons on Acts²⁶, a chapter by the same author on Calvin as commentator on the Acts of the Apostles²⁷, and the respective

²⁴ Calvin's commentary on Acts initially appeared in two volumes, the first in 1552 (containing chapters 1-13) and the second in 1554 (containing chapters 14-28). In 1560 a second and revised edition was published. The critical edition of this work appeared in the series *Opera exegetica*, J. Calvin, *Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum*, ed. H. Feld, in *Ioannis Calvini opera omnia* (COR), series II, volume XII/1 and XII/2 (Geneva, Librairie Droz, 2001). In the rest of this study this particular work, which will be the main working text, will only be referred to as COR XII/1 or COR XII/2, followed by the page number(s) and relevant line number(s). References to any other volumes in COR, will be referred to as COR, and followed by the series number, volume number, page number(s) and relevant line number(s).

²⁵ Harms, *In God's Custody*, 11.

²⁶ W.H.Th. Moehn, *God Calls Us to His Service. The Relation between God and His Audience in Calvin's Sermons on Acts* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, N° CCCXLV] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2001).

²⁷ W.H.Th. Moehn, 'Calvin as Commentator on the Acts of the Apostles', in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. D.K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 199-223.

introductions to the critical editions of Calvin's commentary and sermons on Acts²⁸, the harvest is somewhat meager. E.A. McKee's discussion of Acts 2 and 6 in her study on the diaconate, as well as D.F. Wright's comparison between Calvin's commentary and sermons on Acts 1-7 are also worth mentioning.²⁹ Therefore this study might help fill a void that has not yet been covered by existing Calvin research, either old or more recent.

Approaching Calvin's commentary on Acts with a specific focus on his ecclesiology and Pneumatology necessarily means a limitation on what will be gleaned from this commentary. Interesting subjects and discussions had to be ignored as not relevant for the specific question of this study. However, taking into account the nature and purpose of the book of Acts, ecclesiology and Pneumatology may with some right be considered to form the heart of this book. Studying these topics from Calvin's commentary should give one a comprehensive grasp, not only of these topics, but also of Calvin's overall view on this part of Scripture. Stated differently, the choice of ecclesiology and Pneumatology is not necessarily a limitation, but might just prove to be a useful entrance into this particular exegetical work of the reformer.

Studying ecclesiology and Pneumatology from Calvin's commentary on Acts can, in addition, also add to the existing knowledge on these particular loci. Although the research done on Calvin's ecclesiology and Pneumatology is certainly more extensive than that done on his work on Acts, there is yet more to be investigated. Regarding Calvin's ecclesiology the standard work still remains Charles B. Milner's *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (1970), although the author of this work from the outset chooses a very specific framework, one that determines a lot of the subsequent material.³⁰ For Calvin's Pneumatology one would

²⁸ H. Feld, *Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum*, COR XII/1 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2001), XI-LXXXII; W. Balke and W.H.Th. Moehn, *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles* [Supplementa Calviniana, vol. VIII] (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1994), VII-XLI.

²⁹ E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, N° CXCVII] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984); D.F. Wright, 'Calvin's Commentary and Sermons on Acts 1-7: A Comparison', in *Calvin, Beza and Later Calvinism: Papers Presented at the 15th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society*, ed. D. Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 290-306. See also W. Balke, 'Calvijn en de Pinksterprediking', in *Verbi Divini Minister*, ed. J. van Oort, A. de Reuver, and M. Verduin (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1983), 19-43; W.H.Th. Moehn, 'Mettre ordre en l'Eglise de Dieu – The Election of Officers in Calvin's Sermons on the Acts', in *Calvin Evangelii Propugnator. Calvin, Champion of the Gospel. Papers Presented at the International Congress on Calvin Research, Seoul 1998*, ed. D.F. Wright, A.N.S. Lane and J. Balsarak (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2006), 137-146; E.A. de Boer, 'Pagina Obscura in Geneva: A Fragment from a Sermon by John Calvin', *Calvin Theological Journal* 34 (1999): 162-179; C.K. Barrett, 'Calvino esegeta degli Atti degli Apostoli', *Protestantesimo* 49 (1994): 312-326; S. Scheld, 'Die missionarische Verkündigung des Paulus in Calvins Kommentar der Apostelgeschichte', in *Creatio ex amore. Beiträge zu einer Theologie der Liebe*, ed. T. Franke, M. Knapp, J. Schmid (Würzburg: Echter, 1989), 312-328.

³⁰ B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970): "The unifying principle in Calvin's theology is ... the absolute correlation of the Spirit and the Word." For more on Calvin's ecclesiology, see e.g. J.P. Richel, *Het Kerkbegrip van Calvijn* (Utrecht: Libertas Drukkerijen, 1942); S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943), 98-110; A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans: Dienende Kirche und Kirchlicher Dienst bei Calvin* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1968); W. van't

necessarily have to look to the two well known works, one by W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (1957), and the other by S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvin* (1943).³¹ Both were written many years ago, and in particular Van der Linde's work was written against a specific background. In addition, quite a lot has been written on detail aspects of Calvin's Pneumatology.³² But there is nonetheless room in the extensive and ever-growing library of Calvin research for a work on the intersection of ecclesiology and Pneumatology from one of Calvin's lesser-known commentaries. In this small niche this study hopes to find its place.

Method and outline

The approach followed in this study is at the same time historical, comparative and systematic. In the historical part the commentary on Acts will be chronologically placed within the context of the rest of Calvin's works in order to see the influence of preceding and concurrent works on this particular commentary. Two types of works are of particular importance. Firstly, Calvin's sermons on Acts, which were preached at the same time as the writing of the commentary, are important as direct parallel to the commentary.³³ Therefore, the voice of the preacher will, at relevant junctures, be heard in the systematic part of this study. And secondly, four polemical tracts of the 1540's have emerged as an interesting backdrop to Calvin's

Spijker, 'De Kerk bij Calvin: Theocratie', in *De Kerk. Wezen, Weg en Werk van de Kerk naar Reformatorische Opvatting*, ed. W. van't Spijker et al. (Kampen: Uitgeverij De Groot Goudriaan, 1990), 143-162; G.S.M. Walker, 'Calvin and the Church', in *Calvin's Ecclesiology: Sacraments and Deacons*, ed. R.C. Gamble (New York / London: Garland Publishing, 1992), 120-138; D. Foxgrover, ed., *Calvin and the Church. Papers Presented at the 13th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society May 24-26, 2001* (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2002); E. van der Borgh and G. Mannion, ed., *John Calvin's Ecclesiology. Ecumenical Perspectives* [Ecclesiological Investigations, vol. 10] (London / New York: T&T Clark, 2011).

³¹ W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957); S. Van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvin* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943).

³² See e.g. W. van't Spijker, 'Die Lehre vom Heiligen Geist bei Bucer und Calvin', in *Calvinus Servus Christi. Die Referate des Internationalen Kongresses für Calvinforschung vom 25. Bis 28 August 1986 in Debrecen*, ed. W.H. Neuser (Budapest: Presseabteilung des Raday-Kollegiums, 1988), 73-106; Yoon-Bae Choi, *De Verhouding tussen Pneumatologie en Christologie bij Martin Bucer en Johannes Calvin* (Leiden: Uitgeverij J.J. Groen en Zoon, 1996); I.J. Hesselink, 'Governed and Guided by the Spirit. A Key Issue in Calvin's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit', *Zwingliana* 19/2 (1993): 161-171; Y. Cheng, 'Calvin on the Work of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts', in *Calvin in Asian Churches. Proceedings of the Ninth & Tenth Asian Congresses on Calvin Research*, ed. S-Y. Lee (Seoul: Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary Press, 2008), 113-140; L. Sweetman, 'The Gifts of the Spirit: A Study of Calvin's Comments on 1 Corinthians 12:8-20, 28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11', in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. D.E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1976), 274-284.

³³ For an example of a comparison between sermons and commentary, see D.F. Wright, 'Calvin's Commentary and Sermons on Acts 1-7: A Comparison', in *Calvin, Beza and Later Calvinism: Papers Presented at the 15th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society*, ed. D. Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 290-306.

commentary on Acts, and references to these works will also be made in the systematic part.³⁴

Besides the literary context, Calvin's commentary on Acts is also placed within the historical context of the situation in Geneva, Europe, and other relevant events.

The comparative part is intended to prevent a reading of Calvin's commentary on Acts in isolation from other works on the same book of the Bible. John Chrysostom's homilies on Acts (the only complete commentary on Acts that has survived from the first ten centuries), as well as commentaries by two influential contemporaries of Calvin, Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas de Vio Cajetan, have been chosen as comparative material.

And finally there is the systematic part, the main part of this study, where the implications of Calvin's Pneumatology for his ecclesiology are expounded from this particular commentary. Over the course of this study the systematic part has taken shape with the help of two Biblical phrases, which Calvin considers to be the 'new' element in Pentecost. The phrases "I will pour out" and "on all flesh", taken from Peter's speech in Acts 2:17³⁵, divides the systematic part in two sections, each containing subjects that naturally flow from them.

In *Part 1* the historical background to Calvin's commentary will be sketched (chapter 1). *Part 2* is to be considered as a sort of preparatory part, justifying the choice for the comparative material of Chrysostom, Erasmus and Cajetan (chapter 2), discussing Calvin's view on the book of Acts (chapter 3) and zooming in on Acts 2 as the defining moment of the outpouring of the Spirit (chapter 4). Even after finishing this part, it is still not time to move to the main, systematic part. In order to avoid the danger of dealing with the comparative material as merely an addendum, the next part is an *Intermezzo* in which the Spirit, the church and other relevant topics will be discussed as they come to the fore in Chrysostom's homilies (chapter 5), Erasmus' commentary (chapter 6) and Cajetan's commentary (chapter 7). *Part 3* deals with the subjects that flow from the phrase "I will pour out". As might be expected, this will firstly contain a discussion of the Holy Spirit (chapter 8), after which the gifts of the Spirit (chapter 9), the offices (chapter 10) and doctrine and preaching (chapter 11) are dealt with. The last two of these topics might also have been discussed in another place, but in Calvin's commentary on Acts they flow naturally from Calvin's view on the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. *Part 4*

³⁴ *Supplex exhortatio ad invictissimum Caesarem Carolum quintum et illustrissimos principes, aliosque ordines, Spiraie nunc impirii conventum agentes. Ut restituendae ecclesiae curam serio velint suscipere. Eorum omnium nomine edita qui Christum regnare cupiunt* (Geneva, 1543 – CO 6,453-534); *Admonitio paterna Pauli III. Romani pontificis ad invictissimum Caesarem Carolum V. Cum scholiis* (Geneva, 1545 – CO 7,249-288); *Acta Synodi Tridentinae cum antidoto* (Geneva 1547 – CO 7,365-506); *Interim adultero-germanum, cui adiecta est Vera Christianae pacificationis et ecclesiae reformandae ratio* (Geneva 1549 – CO 7,545-674).

³⁵ See Calvin's commentary on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,57,2-9.

deals with subjects that flow from the phrase “on all flesh”. Chapter 12 discusses the breaking down of the dividing wall and the gradual inclusion of the Gentiles into God’s people, as well as what this means for Israel and the restoration of the church. Chapter 13 contains ecclesiology proper. The images that Calvin most often uses in his commentary to describe the church, the aspect of the true church and her marks, as well as the subject of sects are all discussed. Chapter 14 closes this part with a discussion of the nature of the sacraments, and Calvin’s view on baptism in particular. In a final chapter the question of this study is answered, and conclusions are drawn with regards to its contemporary significance.

It should be noted that I have tried not to pre-determine form, sequence and content of the parts and chapters mentioned above. An honest attempt was made to allow Calvin himself, through the way he structures his commentary and by the frequency he discusses certain topics, to determine the structure and the content. This was done to avoid the impression of being a handbook of Systematic Theology, where the topics generally follow a pre-determined order.³⁶ Regarding the English translation of Calvin’s Latin commentary on Acts, as well as the English translations of other primary sources, the author of this study takes full responsibility for them. However, modern English translations have served as basis and comparison. In cases where translations were taken over literally, this is indicated. Furthermore, although aware of the critical edition of the Institutes in Opera Selecta, this edition was not available in Ukraine where the bulk of this study was done. Use was made of the text in CO, together with the Battles translation, to refer to the Institutes and its development.

Origin and purpose of this study

This study was born from the ministry. In the congregation where I served from 2005-2013 several matters had to be dealt with, all of which raised the underlying question: What is the nature of the church? How should one view the church? To be sure, this is also the context in which Calvin’s preaching and commentaries were born. He was ever the pastor, keeping his eye on the sheep – near (Geneva) and farther away (Europe and beyond).

Having its origin in the concrete life and ministry of the church, this study primarily intends contributing to that very context by being an instrument to building a living and Spirit-filled church and living members in the 21st century. In addition, although in this order, this study

³⁶ See for this criticism on the study of Harms, H.H. van Alten, ‘An Image of the Church in Calvin’s Commentary on the Minor Prophets’, *Koers* 79/4 (2014): 1-2, doi:10.4102/koers.v79i4.2178.

also intends the furthering of Calvin-research, especially where it concerns the relation between the reformer's exegesis and doctrinal thinking.

PART 1
LITERARY AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. CONTEXT – 1541-1554

In order to better understand Calvin as commentator on the book of Acts, and more specifically his view on the Spirit and the church, this chapter takes a closer look at the context in which his commentary on the book of Acts was born. It starts with a discussion of the literary context, and discusses those writings which preceded the commentary and which might have had an influence on the latter. This will, in turn, lead to a discussion of the historical context, both in Geneva and broader.¹

1.1. Literary context

On August 25, 1549, John Calvin delivered the first sermon in his *lectio continua* on the book of Acts.² During the same period he also started with his commentary on Acts.³ It is difficult to determine exactly when Calvin started with the actual writing of his commentary, but from a letter, dated November 10, 1550, and addressed to Farel, it can be deducted that through the course of 1550 Calvin more or less supplied the first nine chapters of Acts with his comments. He writes:

Why do you remind me of Acts and Genesis, embryos hardly yet conceived in the womb? I am ashamed to confess how slowly I am getting on with Acts. I have only done a third (*ex tertia parte*) of it, and what I have written is so long that I foresee it will all be a big volume. I have had to give up Genesis for the time being.⁴

Judging by Calvin's own opinion of his productivity in 1550, the year 1551 was hardly any more productive in terms of the commentary on Acts, seeing that the first part of his commentary was published very early in 1552, containing only chapters 1-13.⁵ On February 29, 1552, Calvin wrote a dedicatory letter to this first part, addressed to Christian III, king of

¹ The years 1541-1554 will form the scope of the historical context – 1541 is the year of Calvin's return to Geneva, and 1554 is the year of publication of the second part of the commentary on Acts.

² SC 8,XIII. This was also the oldest known sermon transcribed by Denis Raguenier, the stenographer who was appointed for this purpose by the deacons of the congregation in Geneva, see W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 94.

³ There is no evidence that Calvin ever gave lectures on this book, or that it was discussed during the *congrégations* on Friday mornings, J.-F. Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, transl. K. Maag [Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 72] (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2005), 49.

⁴ CO 13,655; English translation in: T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1993), 29.

⁵ This means that, after commenting on about nine chapters in 1550, Calvin commented on roughly another four chapters in 1551.

Denmark.⁶ Almost exactly two years later, on January 25, 1554, he dedicated the second part of his commentary to Christian's son, Crown Prince Frederick II of Denmark.⁷ The second and revised edition (1560) would be dedicated to Nicolaus Radziwil, Count Palatine in Vilnius.⁸

How did the progress of the sermons on Acts, in the meantime, compare to that of the commentary? It is hard to determine with which of the two Calvin started – the sermons or the commentary. The only certain starting date that we have with regard to both commentary and sermons is the date of the first sermon on Acts, dated August 25, 1549. From his letter of November 10, 1550, referred to above, we learn that by that time Calvin had commented on about a third of the book of Acts. A day before this letter was written, thus on November 9, Calvin delivered his thirty-sixth sermon on Acts 7:37-38, while on January 11, he delivered his last available sermon on Acts 7:58-60.⁹ From this it can be gauged that the commentary on Acts had, at that time, progressed farther than the sermons. But by the end of his work on Acts the commentary and the preaching converge again. This can be seen from the date of the dedicatory letter to the second part of his commentary, January 25, 1554, while his last sermon on Acts was most probably delivered in March 1554.¹⁰

Nowhere in Calvin's exegetical works do sermons and commentary coincide as in the case of the sermons and commentary on the Acts. Calvin's commentaries were often preceded by either discussion at the *congrégations* or lectures given to students, but his work on Acts provides us with the solitary instance where sermons and commentary, preaching and exegesis go hand in hand.¹¹ This raises the question whether there was a reason, however subtle and implicit it might have been, underlying this unique combination.

⁶ Dedicatory letter to Christian III, COR XII/1,LXIV-LXVIII.

⁷ Dedicatory letter to Frederick II, COR XII/1,LXVIII-LXX.

⁸ Dedicatory letter to Nicolaus Radziwil, COR XII/1,3-10.

⁹ SC 8,XIX. See also W.H.Th. Moehn, 'Calvin as Commentator on the Acts of the Apostles', in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. D.K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 200; C.K. Barrett, 'Calvino esegeta degli Atti degli Apostoli', *Protestantesimo* 49 (1994): 312-326.

¹⁰ SC 2,XVff. After his series on Acts during the morning services, Calvin's next series of sermons was on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and this was started on March 26, 1554, see W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 95; T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 150-157.

¹¹ This does not negate the substantial differences between the sermons and the commentary on Acts, especially when it comes to the economy of words as well as the verses / topics dealt with, see D.F. Wright, 'Calvin's Commentary and Sermons on Acts 1-7: A Comparison', in *Calvin, Beza and Later Calvinism: Papers Presented at the 15th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society*, ed. D. Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 290-306.

1.1.1. Commentaries on the New Testament

For the reformer of Geneva the exposition of Scripture was one of the most important tasks. In 1539 he wrote to Simon Grynaeus about the conversation that they had had three years earlier – thus somewhere around 1536 already – about the best way of interpreting Scripture.¹² They had agreed that lucid brevity (*perspicua brevitās*) was the greatest virtue of an expositor, and that it was his main task to expound the line of thought of the writer.¹³ This task would keep Calvin busy for the rest of his life, with the result being commentaries on almost all the books of the Bible.¹⁴

His first commentary, the one on the letter to the Romans, was published in Strasbourg in 1539. In the *Argumentum* to this commentary Calvin states that, if someone acquired true knowledge of the letter to the Romans, he would have an open door to the most secret treasures of Scripture.¹⁵ Thus, Calvin viewed Romans as a key for understanding Scripture.¹⁶ Subsequent to using this first key, Calvin wrote commentaries on all the other Pauline letters, as well as on the letter to the Hebrews.¹⁷ In this series on the Pauline letters (including Hebrews), Calvin mostly followed the traditional order of the canon, although the commentaries on the letters to the Thessalonians were placed at the end of the series, while the commentary on Hebrews was moved forward. This was probably done as a result of the topics that were chosen for the *congrégations* or the lectures.¹⁸

After finishing with the series on the Pauline letters (and Hebrews), Calvin went on with the remaining letters of the New Testament, the Catholic letters.¹⁹ These were published in one volume in 1551. Apart from 2 and 3 John as well as Revelation, on which Calvin never published commentaries, only the Gospels and Acts were left at this stage. To which would Calvin turn next?

¹² CO 10,402.

¹³ CO 10,402-403.

¹⁴ Of course, Calvin's 'commentaries' on the books of the Old Testament were not commentaries in the true sense of the word, but rather word for word publications of his exegetical lectures, see J.-F. Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, 51-59.

¹⁵ COR II/XIII,7.

¹⁶ A similar view was held by Melancthon, who published on Romans shortly before the first edition of his *Loci communes* of 1521.

¹⁷ Especially since 1548 Calvin was very productive. See the list of Calvin's Pauline commentaries in D.K. McKim, ed., *Calvin and the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 256.

¹⁸ E.g. Hebrews was discussed at the *congrégations* until the end of 1549, and Calvin's commentary on Hebrews appeared in May of the same year; see also CO 21,71.

¹⁹ For the critical edition of this commentary, see COR, series II, volume XX.

1.1.2. Next: Gospels or Acts?

One would expect that, after finishing with the New Testament letters, Calvin would subsequently turn to the Gospels. After all, the content of the Gospels chronologically precede that of the Acts of the Apostles. However, Calvin follows a slightly different route. As mentioned above, on August 25, 1549, he delivers his first sermon on the book of Acts. During the same period he also starts with his commentary on the book of Acts. Only during the next year, while already preaching and writing on Acts, the Gospel of John becomes the topic for discussion during the meetings on Friday mornings.²⁰ This interesting fact, although not all-important, becomes even more noteworthy when one considers Calvin's view on the fourth Gospel – for the reformer of Geneva the Gospel of John has a similar position in relation to the other Gospels, as the letter to the Romans has in relation to the rest of Scripture. In his *Argumentum* to the commentary on John he states that this Gospel is a key in opening the understanding to the other Gospels.²¹ But despite his high view of the fourth Gospel as key to the synoptics, Calvin chose to start working on Acts before taking up John, although the gap in time is only marginal and should not be overstressed. While choosing the Gospel of John for the bible study of the ministers, the book of Acts was chosen for the public preaching.

What is significant, however, is that after part one of the commentary on Acts was published in 1552, Calvin first finishes the commentary on John (published in 1553) before publishing the second part on Acts (1554). The reason for this 'interruption' is not clear. Some scholars suggest that Servetus' *Christianismi Restitutio*, in which the author used passages from the Gospel of John to defend his Christological and Trinitarian doctrines, was the reason for Calvin to turn his attention to the commentary on John.²² Although *Christianismi Restitutio* was only published in January 1553, Calvin already had a manuscript copy in his possession, which Servetus sent him during a period of correspondence in 1546-1547.²³ Others give Bolsec's

²⁰ For more on this, see COR, series VII, volume I, 27-31.

²¹ COR II/XI,1,7.

²² This is the proposal of Helmut Feld in his introduction to the most recent Latin edition of Calvin's commentary on the Gospel of John, COR II,XI/1,xi. E.A. de Boer found additional proof for this in Calvin's *congrégation* on John 1, see COR VII,1,27-29.

²³ W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 160-161. For more on Calvin's conflict with Servetus, see A. Baars, *Om Gods Verhevenheid en Zijn Nabijheid. De Drie-eenheid bij Calvijn* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2004), 146-229.

objection to the Genevan ministers' view on predestination as one of the "more pressing challenges" that made Calvin decide to shift his focus to the interpretation of John.²⁴

Whatever the case might have been, it can in general be concluded that certain reasons – which will still be investigated – prompted Calvin to start working (preaching and commenting) on Acts rather than on John (or any of the synoptic Gospels), which would have been a more logical choice. However, in the course of time other reasons made him temporarily shift his focus away from Acts towards John. In order to get a clearer view on the possible reasons for initially starting with Acts instead of the Gospels, it will be beneficial to look at the wider context of Calvin's writings.

1.2. Polemical writings of the 1540's

Chronologically the work on the Acts of the Apostles (preaching and commenting) started hot on the heels of a series of four interconnected polemical writings, which Calvin wrote during the forties of the sixteenth century.²⁵ In these writings, which were all reactions to specific situations, Calvin showed his ecumenical involvement with the struggle of the Reformation in the Holy Roman Empire, as well as his knowledge and rejection of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. In more than one aspect the commentary on Acts shows a link with these polemical writings. This will become clear in the subsequent paragraphs.

1.2.1. "The Necessity of Reforming the Church" (1543)

On October 25, 1543, Calvin received a letter from Martin Bucer in which he was requested to provide the upcoming Diet of Speyer with a clear explanation of the state of affairs between Roman Catholics and Protestants.²⁶ Calvin obliged, and the result was his *Supplex exhortatio ad Caesarem*.²⁷ In this writing he calls upon the emperor and the princes to seriously take up

²⁴ For this view, see B. Pitkin, 'Calvin as Commentator on the Gospel of John', in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. D.K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 167-168.

²⁵ For more on the interconnectedness of these writings, see Th. W. Casteel, 'Calvin and Trent: Calvin's Reaction to the Council of Trent in the Context of His Conciliar Thought', *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970): 91-117.

²⁶ For more on the religious dialogues, see M. Stolk, *Johannes Calvijn en de Godsdienstgesprekken tussen Rooms-Katholieken en Protestanten in Hagenau, Worms en Regensburg (1540-1541)* (Kampen: Kok, 2004).

²⁷ Full title: *Supplex exhortatio ad invictissimum Caesarem Carolum quintum et illustrissimos principes, aliosque ordines, Spiraie nunc impirii conventum agentes. Ut restituendae ecclesiae curam serio velint suscipere. Eorum omnium nomine edita qui Christum regnare cupiunt* (Geneva, 1543 – CO 6,453-534). See also J.J. Steenkamp, 'Calvin's Exhortation to Charles V (1543)', in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*, ed. W.H. Neuser and B.G. Armstrong [Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, 36] (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), 309-314.

the restoration of the church. This, according to Calvin, is not merely a personal call, but it should be viewed as the united voice of all who either have already taken care to restore the church, or are desirous that it should be restored to true order.²⁸ Calvin then highlights the three most important matters of his writing, which he will subsequently discuss in more detail:

First, I must briefly enumerate the evils, which compelled us to seek for remedies. Secondly, I must show that the particular remedies, which our reformers employed were apt and salutary. Finally, I must make it plain that we were not at liberty any longer to delay putting forth our hand, in as much as the matter demanded instant amendment.²⁹

In the words of a contemporary, Theodore Beza, who was certainly in a position to judge, having worked so closely with Calvin for a number of years: “I know not if any writing on the subject, more powerful or solid, has been published in our age.”³⁰ Whether the emperor ever read this writing is unknown, but the Diet nevertheless produced a positive result for the German Protestants. On June 10, 1544, Charles V, much in need of the assistance of the Empire for an offensive against France, promised that he would convene a general and free council.³¹

1.2.2. “A Paternal Admonition”, with Calvin’s Remarks (1545)

As soon as Pope Paul III became aware of the abovementioned imperial promise, he addressed a paternal admonition to Charles V, dated August 24, 1544. In this writing the pope admonishes the emperor for promising the Protestants a council without his permission. He reminds Charles that in the ecclesiastical sphere the emperor’s role is that of the arm, not the head.³²

Again it is instructive to listen to Beza’s comments in this regard: “Pope Paul III, feeling very indignant at such a proceeding, published a very grave admonition to Charles for his having thus placed the heretics on a level with the Catholics, and for putting his scythe into a crop which belonged to another.”³³ The emperor was, however, given the assurance that a general council is certainly part of the pope’s plans to restore peace and unity in the church. In fact,

²⁸ CO 6,458.

²⁹ CO 6,459.

³⁰ CO 21,136.

³¹ C. Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 223-227.

³² CO 7,279-280.

³³ CO 21,136.

according to his own account the pope has dispatched his legates on several occasions with the purpose of calling together a general council, but never with the desired result. The pope finally calls on the emperor to help pave the way for such a council (as is his appropriate office).³⁴

This paternal admonition somehow became public, and it led to several responses by leaders from the Reformation. Calvin also took the time to react.³⁵ In this tract he shows that the pope's claims are baseless – in history it has not been the popes, but rather the emperors, who assembled councils. For the pope to make such a claim, he would have to abolish all acts of councils and all ancient history.³⁶ In addition, it has always been regarded as the right of Christian princes to remove the corruptions of the church and restore it to its proper state.³⁷ Calvin admits that the pope has sometimes made a show of calling a council, but there was never any serious intention of assembling it.³⁸ The same applies to the planned Council of Trent, which Calvin mentions here for the first time. Calvin doubts whether this council will ever materialise, seeing that the two most important monarchs of the Christian world were at that stage engaged in war.³⁹ And if it did somehow materialise, the Germans would not be so silly as to put themselves in so much danger.⁴⁰ Calvin ends by calling on the emperor to keep his word to convene a council.⁴¹

1.2.3. “Decrees of the Council of Trent”, with Calvin's Antidote (1547)

Things turned out differently than Calvin anticipated. Nothing came of Charles' promise to the Protestants, and the Council of Trent did in fact materialise. In September 1544 Pope Paul III determined that a council would convene in Trent in March 1545. However, the proceedings finally got underway in December 1545. When the council was suspended on March 3, 1547, after seven sessions, Calvin shortly afterwards published his *Acta Synodi Tridentinae cum antidoto* (December 1547).⁴²

³⁴ CO 7,281-282.

³⁵ Full title: *Admonitio paterna Pauli III. Romani pontificis ad invictissimum Caesarem Carolum V. Cum scholiis* (Geneva, 1545 – CO 7,249-288).

³⁶ CO 7,261.

³⁷ CO 7,266.

³⁸ CO 7,279.

³⁹ CO 7,281.

⁴⁰ CO 7,281.

⁴¹ CO 7,288.

⁴² Full title: *Acta Synodi Tridentinae cum antidoto* (Geneva 1547 – CO 7,365-506).

Interestingly, in the letter to the reader that accompanied this antidote, Calvin himself links this writing to the one of 1543 (*Supplex exhortatio*).⁴³ He begs his readers to first read the treatise on the necessity of reforming the church before reading this antidote. Thereafter they will be in a position to decide to which party they ought to incline.⁴⁴

Calvin starts his antidote by stating that councils are deservedly honoured by all the godly.⁴⁵ For holy pastors to meet and determine what the Holy Spirit has determined for the church has been the usual remedy, which God employed from the beginning in curing the diseases of his church.⁴⁶ Therefore, in the current state of corruption many have long desired a council. However, the composition and working of the Council of Trent is of such a nature that not a lot can be expected of it. On the one hand, Calvin ridicules the composition of the Council of Trent, especially the two French delegates, which, according to him, are both equally unlearned and dumb.⁴⁷ On the other hand he ridicules the working of the council, where each decision is dictated to the delegates by a set of sophists, after which it is sent to Rome for the pope and his advisers to add and change as they please.

Why do they not openly confess the thing as it is – that ten or twenty monks, whose labours they have hired, concoct the decrees, that the pope puts his censorial pen through whatever does not please him, and approves of the rest – that nothing is left to the council but the burden of publishing?⁴⁸

Next Calvin discusses the opening address by the Papal legates. From this he draws the conclusion that any expectation, which the Christian world might have had of open discussions on important points of doctrine, has been in vain. The legates made it very clear that the council is not held with the purpose of inquiry, but to uphold the existing doctrine and rites.⁴⁹ But in order to create the impression that the council was not held for nothing, there will, perhaps, be

⁴³ See also footnote 25 in this chapter.

⁴⁴ CO 7,369-370.

⁴⁵ See Inst. IV.9 for Calvin's appreciation of councils. Even as late as 1560, in a memorandum entitled *Memoire sur le consile*, Calvin pleaded for an ecumenical council (CO 18,285-287; see Th. W. Casteel, 'Calvin and Trent', 115-117).

⁴⁶ CO 7,379.

⁴⁷ CO 7,382.

⁴⁸ CO 7,383-384.

⁴⁹ CO 7,387.

some reformation in caps and shoes, and other parts of dress.⁵⁰ Therefore, those who are calling for the restitution of the fallen state of the church, have just grounds to do so.⁵¹

After having dealt with these preliminary matters, Calvin proceeds to consider each of the canons of the Council of Trent verbatim, after which he refutes them. He deals with each canon in chronological order – the rule of faith (confession and Scripture), original sin, justification, and the sacraments. Finally, after dealing with all the canons of this session, he calls on his readers to disregard these decrees and not wait any longer for a pious council to settle the dissensions within the church. “This is not a time to keep waiting for one another. As everyone sees the light of Scripture beaming forth, let him instantly follow.”⁵²

1.2.4. “Adultero-German Interim” (1549)

While the council was meeting in Trent, Charles V was waging war with the Lutheran princes of the Schmalkaldic League, a defensive alliance of Lutheran princes within the Holy Roman Empire (1531-1547). This was a war, which the Lutheran princes were far better equipped to deal with than the emperor. However, shortly after the Council of Trent was suspended on March 3, 1547, Charles V succeeded in decisively defeating the Schmalkaldic League. On April 24, 1547, he routed the League’s forces at the Battle of Mühlberg. Charles’ initial intention with this war was to force the defeated Protestants to attend the Council of Trent, and in this way bring them back in the bosom of the Roman church. However, by now the council was suspended, and, in addition, it was decided by the pope to move the council from Trent (on the territory of the Holy Roman Empire) to Bologna (on Papal territory). This decision did not have the consent of the emperor. Consequently, the Diet of Augsburg (1547/48), which followed soon after the end of the Schmalkaldic War, took on an extra significance. Being at loggerheads with the pope, the emperor decided to find his own solution with the Protestants. During this Diet Charles issued the *Augsburg Interim* (May 1548), a document that outlined a temporary solution to the religious divisions between Roman Catholics and Protestants within the empire. Temporary: until a general council could formulate a definite solution. The Interim in essence meant a return to Roman Catholicism for the Protestants, except for the temporary concessions that they had won: the passing of the cup during the celebration of the Lord’s

⁵⁰ CO 7,388.

⁵¹ CO 7,394.

⁵² CO 7,506.

Supper and permission for priests to marry. It is needless to say that none of the parties were satisfied by the Interim.⁵³

Calvin responded to the Interim in the spring of 1549 with his *Interim adultero-germanum*.⁵⁴ This treatise consists of two parts: the text of the Interim, and Calvin's explanation of the true manner in which to ensure Christian peace and to reform the church.

In the introduction to his treatise, Calvin discusses how true peace and concord should be established among Christians. While the truth of the Gospel is the only bond of peace, according to Calvin, the peace that is offered by the Interim adulterates the pure doctrine of Christ.⁵⁵ Seeing that the draftsmen of the Interim only want to protect what they deem fundamental, while the loss of other things is tolerable, the believers are left with only half a Christ. Subsequently Calvin proceeds to determine what exactly the heads of doctrine are which are necessary in order to preserve the state of the church.⁵⁶ He then treats the following topics in order: justification by faith, confession of guilt and penance, the service of God, the church, the sacraments, intercession of the saints and angels and prayers for the dead, fasting, celibacy and ceremonies. For the pure doctrine set out in this writing Calvin is willing to die.⁵⁷

1.2.5. Connection in content

The contextual interconnection of the abovementioned writings probably needs very little elaboration. It is clear that the political-religious interplay between the German Protestants, the emperor and the pope (i.e. the Papists) provides the main backdrop to all of these writings. Added to this, Calvin himself connects a few of these writings explicitly.⁵⁸ The question remains, however, whether a link in the content of the different writings can be established. Are there common themes that recur in these writings? For the sake of eventually establishing the link with the commentary on Acts, this paragraph will be worked out more extensively than the previous paragraphs. Contextual links are important, but finally the link must be proven from the content.

⁵³ W.H.Th. Moehn, *God Calls Us to His Service. The Relation between God and His Audience in Calvin's Sermons on Acts* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, N° CCCXLV] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2001), 25-26.

⁵⁴ Full title: *Interim adultero-germanum, cui adiecta est Vera Christianae pacificationis et ecclesiae reformandae ratio* (Geneva 1549 – CO 7,545-674).

⁵⁵ CO 7,591.

⁵⁶ CO 7,593.

⁵⁷ CO 7,674.

⁵⁸ See footnotes 25 and 43 above.

Restoration of the church

The full title of the first of the abovementioned polemical writings (*Supplex exhortatio*, 1543) provides the ideal starting point for linking all these writings together with regards to their content. In this title Calvin's concern for the restoration of the church is immediately apparent.⁵⁹ Apart from the main title (*De necessitate reformandae ecclesiae*), Calvin in the subtitle exhorts the emperor seriously to undertake the task of restoring the church (... *ut restituendae ecclesiae curam serio velint suscipere*).⁶⁰ In addition, the third writing (*Acta Synodi Tridentinae cum antidoto*) refers the readers to this first writing for proper instruction on the matter of restoration.⁶¹ The last of the four writings also carries the thought of restoration in its subtitle (*Vera christianae pacificationis et ecclesiae reformandae ratio*)⁶², while the second writing places the theme of the restoration of the church within the specific context of the role of kings and princes in the act of restoration.⁶³ Thus it can be concluded that the theme of the restoration of the church plays an important role in these writings.

For Calvin the restoration of the church is first and foremost a work of God, and no more depends on the hopes and opinions of men, than the resurrection of the dead or any other miracle.⁶⁴ God, however, does this work through specific people whom he uses as his instruments, although Calvin strongly differs from Rome, who claims this task for itself. He admits to the pope that it is not every man's business to engage in removing the corruptions of the church and restore it to its proper state, but how can this task be denied to Christian princes?⁶⁵ He challenges the pope to show that the power of convening a council and of restoring the church to its true condition is committed to priests alone and forbidden to kings.⁶⁶ In addition, is God not allowed to raise up prophets and ministers in an extraordinary way by his Spirit to restore his fallen and ruined church?⁶⁷

⁵⁹ The differences between the terms used to describe the reformation of the church (e.g. *reformatio*, *restoratio*, *restitutio*, *instauratio*) will not be discussed in detail at this point, but will receive the necessary attention in the context of the commentary on Acts. At this point it is merely worth noting that the reformation of the church was a recurring theme in the abovementioned writings of the 1540's.

⁶⁰ CO 6,453.

⁶¹ CO 7,369-370.

⁶² CO 7,591-592.

⁶³ CO 7,266; 7,269; 7,285.

⁶⁴ CO 6,510.

⁶⁵ CO 7,266.

⁶⁶ CO 7,269.

⁶⁷ CO 7,636.

Calvin has no hope that the Papists will take up the task of restoring the church. Even if the pope does convene a council, that great body will be ready to suffer anything rather than allow the church to be restored to a better condition. Calvin leaves it to the prudence of the emperor and the princes to consider whether it is in the private interest of the Roman Pontiff and his whole faction that the church should be restored to true order, according to the standard of the Gospel.⁶⁸ When, contrary to Calvin's expectation, a council does eventually meet in Trent, it does not incline him towards a more optimistic view. After discussing the decision of the council during their fourth session to condemn all translations except the Vulgate, while the blemishes are there for all to see, Calvin exclaims: "Behold the men on whose judgment the renovation of the church depends!"⁶⁹

For Calvin all restoration of the church is a restoration of the doctrine of godliness to its integrity.⁷⁰ He admits that, if it were to be his task to exhort the Romanists to do exactly this – to restore the doctrine of godliness and cleanse the church of corruption – it would be a very difficult task.⁷¹ On the other hand he urges the emperor and the princes to examine the Protestants' whole doctrine, their form of administering the sacraments, and their method of governing the church. In none of these things will it be found that any change has been made, unless there was an attempt to restore something to the standard of the Word of God, which can never be faulted.⁷²

The ancient church

In calling for the restoration of the church, Calvin is not calling for something new. Instead, he is constantly calling for a return to the church as it was in the beginning⁷³, to those purer ages, which were distinguished for learning and piety.⁷⁴ By this he refers to the apostolic church,⁷⁵ the church as it was from the beginning of the Gospel.⁷⁶ He often calls it the church in its prime or the ancient church (*ecclesia vetus*).⁷⁷

⁶⁸ CO 6,529.

⁶⁹ CO 7,414.

⁷⁰ CO 6,473.

⁷¹ CO 7,369-370.

⁷² CO 6,474.

⁷³ See e.g. CO 7,379; CO 7,612.

⁷⁴ CO 7,381.

⁷⁵ See e.g. CO 6,497; CO 7,393; CO 7,613.

⁷⁶ CO 7,610.

⁷⁷ See e.g. CO 6,474; CO 7,381; CO 7,413; CO 7,605.

According to Calvin this ancient church has nothing in common with the Roman church of his time.⁷⁸ In fact, the prophets and apostles had a similar contest with the pretended church of their days, as the contest that the reformers were having with the Roman Pontiff and his whole cohort.⁷⁹ Maybe once, long ago, Rome was the boasted unity of the church, but it has now been worn off by long use⁸⁰, and the Principal See has now been destitute of a true bishop for more than eight hundred years.⁸¹ It is clear that both the doctrine and the administration of the Papacy differ so much from the majority of ancient councils, that they are complete opposites of each other.⁸² Even if it is taken for granted that the primacy of the pope has been sanctioned by the consent of the ancient church, it must still be shown that Rome is a true church and has a true bishop.⁸³ This naturally leads one to two other important aspects present in these writings: the church and the offices.

The church

When Calvin talks about the church in the four polemical writings of the 1540's, he seldom does this without also talking about true doctrine. The church depends as much on this doctrine as human life depends on the soul. If the purity of this doctrine is in any degree impaired, the church has received a deadly wound.⁸⁴ Calvin is very clear about the fact that, in his view, the Papists have perverted and corrupted doctrine⁸⁵, while the Reformation has thrown the light of Scripture on the pure doctrine.⁸⁶

The true church is there where true doctrine is to be found. If Rome, therefore, wants to claim that they have the church, they must first show that the true doctrine of God is among them, because this is the mark (*nota*) which God himself impressed upon his church, that she might be discerned thereby.⁸⁷ Calvin wished that Rome could show them a church as Scripture itself portrays it, then they would give it the respect it deserved. But Rome falsely assumes the name of church.⁸⁸ Leaving the church of Rome is, therefore, not a departure from the church, but rather shows the distinction between the true church and the false church.⁸⁹

⁷⁸ CO 7,611.

⁷⁹ CO 6,519.

⁸⁰ CO 7,259.

⁸¹ CO 7,275.

⁸² CO 7,381.

⁸³ CO 6,523.

⁸⁴ CO 6,467.

⁸⁵ See e.g. CO 6,465; CO 7,275; CO 7,406; CO 7,591.

⁸⁶ CO 6,473.

⁸⁷ CO 6,520.

⁸⁸ CO 7,418.

⁸⁹ CO 7,260.

Pure doctrine serves to bring the church together in a holy unity.⁹⁰ Calvin admits that the vengeance of God is on all who violate the unity of the church. But, he asks, what greater violation of unity exists than when purity of doctrine is adulterated and Christ, as a consequence, is torn to pieces?⁹¹ From this last statement it can be seen that, for Calvin, the unifying power of the pure doctrine is essentially a unity in Christ. Christ is the only bond of holy unity. He who departs from him disturbs and violates unity.⁹² Therefore he desires that all the Germans would sincerely unite in adopting a pure faith, and cling together under one common head, namely Christ. Calvin's ultimate desire is that the whole world could be brought to this unity, forming one sheepfold under one Shepherd.⁹³

The offices

Whereas doctrine is the soul of the church (see above), the pastoral office and all other matters of rule and order resemble the body.⁹⁴ This order is not unimportant, and should not be disturbed in the church. However, the state of the church should be ordered according to the will of Christ.⁹⁵

For Calvin Christ's object in appointing bishops and pastors was that they might edify the church with sound doctrine, and therefore no man is a true pastor who does not perform the office of teaching.⁹⁶ This line of thought is so obvious throughout all four writings, that it would be repetitious to mention all the places where Calvin talks about it. It will suffice to draw the main lines.

According to Calvin the apostles discharged their office by preaching the Gospel.⁹⁷ Although he does not believe that the office of apostle is permanent,⁹⁸ he is still convinced that the task of preaching and teaching should be fulfilled by every office bearer.⁹⁹ And even if it would be the case that the church needs successors for the apostles, let successors be sought among those who have faithfully handed down the apostles' doctrine to posterity.¹⁰⁰ But this is not the case among the Papists. Scarcely one in a hundred of the bishops will be found who ever mount the

⁹⁰ CO 6,521.

⁹¹ CO 7,275.

⁹² CO 7,259.

⁹³ CO 7,280.

⁹⁴ CO 6,459.

⁹⁵ CO 7,266.

⁹⁶ CO 6,469.

⁹⁷ CO 7,604.

⁹⁸ CO 7,616.

⁹⁹ See e.g. CO 6,469-470; CO 7,391; CO 7,676.

¹⁰⁰ CO 7,611.

pulpit in order to teach.¹⁰¹ How long, then, will the title of pastor be usurped by men who have nothing pastoral but the badge of a silver staff?¹⁰²

Sacraments

In all four writings, except for Calvin's reaction to Pope Paul III's paternal admonition, the sacraments play a very important role. As with the previous aspects, Calvin often contrasts the Scriptural teaching on the sacraments to the teaching of the Papists. Against the seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church, Calvin clearly states that no sacrament is legitimate unless it has been instituted by Christ, and Christ only instituted two. In addition, the two that Christ instituted were badly corrupted by the Papists.¹⁰³

Central to Calvin's view on the sacraments as well as his criticism of the sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church is, that with the external sign (the visible symbol) goes the spiritual truth which it represents.¹⁰⁴ Common to the sacraments is that, in a manner adapted to the human intellect, they exhibit what is spiritual by a visible sign.¹⁰⁵ Calvin accuses the Papists of putting all the focus on the sign, and completely neglecting the thing signified. No word is said of the significance and truth of the sacraments, and therefore, while being entertained with showy ceremonies, the people are merely presented with empty figures.¹⁰⁶ When the true doctrine is subverted, the power and utility of the sacraments are gone, although the external form may be without faults.¹⁰⁷

And if this happens, the sacraments are separated from faith. The Papists pretend that the sacraments have a magical power, which is efficacious without faith, and in this way they destroy the relation that the Scriptures establish between the sacraments and faith.¹⁰⁸ They so extol the efficacy of the signs, that, instead of directing men to Christ, they teach them to confide in visible signs. In contrast, the reformers have brought the church back to the ancient custom of accompanying the administration of the sacraments with an explanation of the doctrine contained in it.¹⁰⁹

With regard to baptism Calvin criticises Rome for claiming the absolute necessity of it, for thereby they tie down the salvation of men to external signs. In the meantime they postpone

¹⁰¹ CO 6,469; CO 7,633-634.

¹⁰² CO 7,390.

¹⁰³ CO 6,467; CO 7,614.

¹⁰⁴ CO 6,489.

¹⁰⁵ CO 7,621.

¹⁰⁶ CO 6, 468.

¹⁰⁷ CO 6,467.

¹⁰⁸ CO 7,494-495.

¹⁰⁹ CO 6,488-490.

the explanation of the doctrine of baptism, as if it were of little importance, and insist on the bare pronounciation of the words, as if Christ had dictated some kind of magical charm.¹¹⁰ According to Calvin, however, baptism is nothing else than an appendage to the Gospel.¹¹¹ Regarding infant baptism, he denies that it has its origin in the tradition of the church; it is founded on the institution of God, and has derived its origin from circumcision.¹¹² Regarding the Lord's Supper, Calvin aims his arrows at several aspects of the Roman mass. He, for instance, accuses Rome of destroying the virtue of the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ by daily sacrificing him again.¹¹³ Furthermore, he blames them for taking away the cup from the church, as if Christ instituted a special sacrament that was only meant for the priests.¹¹⁴ And finally, Calvin also ridicules the Papacy for gazing stupidly at the outward sign, while forgetting that Christ is to be sought amid the glories of heaven. Therefore, he urges, we should lay aside all earthly thoughts of Christ, and worship him with our minds raised up to heaven.¹¹⁵

Papacy

From the above it is clear that Calvin's involvement with the situation of the Protestants in Europe is, at the same time, a polemic with Rome. And for Calvin a polemic with Rome is first and foremost a polemic with the pope. He views the pope as a tyrant, who shows no signs of representing Christ on earth.¹¹⁶ The pope is a wolf by which the sheep of Christ are devoured, but still he wants to be esteemed as the viceregent of Christ.¹¹⁷ Calvin deems the primacy of the pope intolerable¹¹⁸, and this primacy was never heard of at the time when there was still a church in Rome.¹¹⁹ But Calvin is nonetheless willing to admit that the pope is the successor of Peter, provided that he performs the office of an apostle.¹²⁰ But instead of performing the office of an apostle by conveying the true doctrine, the pope rather subordinates the true doctrine to his own judgment.¹²¹ Furthermore, Calvin has no good words for the bishops and the priests. The pope has a lot to say about the fault of the emperor in promising a general council (if it can even be called a fault), but he is silent about the countless villainies

¹¹⁰ CO 7,619-620.

¹¹¹ CO 7,449.

¹¹² CO 7,614.

¹¹³ CO 6,507-508.

¹¹⁴ CO 7,625.

¹¹⁵ CO 7,623.

¹¹⁶ CO 7,268.

¹¹⁷ CO 7,278.

¹¹⁸ CO 6,522; CO 7,615.

¹¹⁹ CO 7,395.

¹²⁰ CO 7,611.

¹²¹ CO 6,524; CO 7,283.

of his own sons.¹²² When new clergy are appointed, no account is taken either of life or doctrine, while the right of voting had been wrested from the people.¹²³ And to make matters worse, offices are even sold to the highest bidder.¹²⁴ Therefore Calvin wholly denies that the Papal priesthood is founded on a divine call.¹²⁵

1.2.6. Summary

In the discussion of the content of the abovementioned polemical writings certain distinct themes have emerged, themes that all pertain to Calvin's vision on the essential elements of being church and to the good functioning of the church. Throughout these writings Calvin pleads for the restoration of the church to its original, apostolic form by returning to the true doctrine, which the apostles originally proclaimed, and by restoring the offices and the sacraments as Christ intended them. This is done in constant opposition to the corruption among the Papists of Calvin's days.

These ecclesiological themes will resurface in Calvin's commentary on the Acts of the Apostles and, when appropriate, cross-references to the polemical writings will be made. When the commentary is discussed in the systematic part, it will be fruitful to keep these themes in mind in order to see how Calvin repeats and elaborates on them, as well as to see how he adds themes that are specific to the content of the book of Acts.

1.3. Dedications

In addition to the links, both in context and in content, which were established between the writings discussed in paragraph 1.2, there is the interesting fact that Calvin dedicated the two parts of his commentary on Acts to persons who were intimately involved with the abovementioned political and religious scene of the Holy Roman Empire in the 1540's. This establishes, at least, a formal link between the writings discussed in paragraph 1.2 and the commentary on Acts. The first part of the commentary was dedicated to Christian III (1503-1559), king of Denmark from 1534 until 1559. The second part was dedicated to his son,

¹²² CO 7,257.

¹²³ CO 6,492.

¹²⁴ CO 6,513.

¹²⁵ CO 7,632.

Frederick II (1534-1588), who was made co-regent by his father in 1542, and who took over the reign from his father in 1559.¹²⁶

After the civil war that followed on the death of king Frederick I in 1533, his son Christian was made king of Denmark by the national council. Being a devout Lutheran, he was now in the position to reorganise a state and a church that had previously been predominantly Roman Catholic. In the future the Lutheran religion would be the only one allowed in Denmark. Johannes Bugenhagen was sent from Wittenberg to Copenhagen in 1537 to lead the establishment of the Lutheran church in Denmark. All the Catholic bishops were arrested and subsequently dismissed. New Lutheran bishops were ordained and Christian III took on the role of defender of the faith and principal member of the church.¹²⁷

In 1538 Christian made the decision to join the Schmalkaldic League of Lutheran princes. In a country that was in close geographical proximity to the other countries of the League, and where the Lutheran religion reigned, this was probably due to happen sooner or later. However, Christian III was not merely a puppet of the League. On the contrary, in his foreign policy he allied himself closely to Emperor Charles V through the Treaty of Speyer. During the Diet of Speyer (1544) Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire signed this treaty, which stated that during the reign of Christian III, Denmark would maintain a peaceful foreign policy towards the empire. Christian consistently kept this promise, which meant that he often had to withdraw himself from the actions of his Lutheran comrades in Germany. This also happened during the Schmalkaldic War of 1546-1547.¹²⁸

Calvin's dedication to Christian III (and his son, Frederick II) should probably be viewed against this political and religious background. To a king who has only recently brought his country to the light of the reformed faith, Calvin dedicates a commentary that depicts, in a comparable fashion, the beginnings of the kingdom of Christ.¹²⁹ What he only implies in the letter to Christian III, he clearly says in the letter to Frederick II:

¹²⁶ For more on the dedications in general, see J.-F. Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, 195-212; J.-F. Gilmont, 'Les dédicataires de Calvin', in *Calvin et ses contemporains*, ed. O. Millet (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998), 117-134.

¹²⁷ M.S. Lausten, *A Church History of Denmark* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2002), 109-111.

¹²⁸ M.S. Lausten, 'Christian III' in *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, vol. 1, ed. H.J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 311-312.

¹²⁹ COR XII/1, LXIV-LXV.

... I thought it would be suitable to connect you with the narrative of that history, which embraces the very beginnings of the Christian church right from its actual birth, and then its advances and increases, so that the precise resemblance of the reborn church, which the Lord has committed to your protection, may encourage you more and more in the right course of duty.¹³⁰

Therefore, the king of Denmark would do good to acquaint himself with the features of the kingdom of Christ: firstly, the teaching of the Gospel by which Christ gathers and governs his church, and secondly, the fellowship of the believers through their common faith.¹³¹ It seems, from the letter to Frederick II, that this has indeed happened, for Calvin observes with joy that the kingdom of Christ has been putting down deeper en firmer roots in Denmark.¹³²

On the other hand, Calvin warns King Christian against the heralds of the Roman Antichrist, who constantly claim that they have the church, but who instead have severed the Head, Christ, from the body.¹³³ The Papists are left with a dead body, for they have abolished the teaching of the Gospel, which is the true soul of the church.¹³⁴ As an example, Calvin then makes an interesting reference to the ‘Tridentine Fathers’ – even if they are meeting in, what is unashamedly called, a ‘holy, general and lawful council’, it still does not mean that they have the church.¹³⁵ Calvin advises Christian III that the difference between the true Church and the Roman Curia will become clear when one compares the church, as it is described by Luke in the book of Acts, with the pope’s synagogue.¹³⁶

When, in 1560, a second and revised edition of the commentary on the Acts of the Apostles was prepared, Calvin made the decision to write a new dedication to Nicolaus Radziwil of Poland. In this dedicatory letter Calvin provides the reason for deleting the names of the Danish kings, namely that:

... the insolence of certain men forced me to expunge their names in this second edition. For they have been roused to fierce hatred of me, and while they are afraid that the majesty of kings may procure some favour for my writings, they make it known that the kings were

¹³⁰ COR XII/1, LXIX-LXX.

¹³¹ COR XII/1, LXV.

¹³² COR XII/1, LXVIII-LXIX.

¹³³ COR XII/1, LXV-LXVI.

¹³⁴ COR XII/1, LXVI; the same theme was already identified in *Supplex exhortatio* (see footnote 84 above), and will be discussed in depth in chapter 11 of this study.

¹³⁵ COR XII/1, LXVII.

¹³⁶ COR XII/1, LXVII.

extremely displeased that their own name was mixed up with a doctrine of the sacraments that they condemn. Whether that is true or not I leave undecided...¹³⁷

The implication of Calvin's words seems to be that the kings of Denmark were negatively influenced by their Lutheran confidantes, especially regarding the doctrine of the sacraments. He does not blame the dead father (Christian III) or his son (Frederick II) for this, as he still had the greatest respect for both of them.¹³⁸ However, it has no sense forcing his writings on unwilling recipients.¹³⁹

An additional reason for the change in dedication, that has been put forward and which connects to the reason that Calvin himself gave, is the inhospitable treatment which John a Lasco and his refugee congregation had received from the Danes in 1554.¹⁴⁰ After being driven out of England by Queen Mary, a Lasco and the members of his congregation sought asylum somewhere else. A heavy storm dispersed their fleet. Finally, the ship in which a Lasco was sailing, found shelter in the Danish port of Elsinore. Initially the refugees were well received by the Danes, but soon their asylum was disturbed at the instigation of Lutheran ministers, and they were forced to leave the country.¹⁴¹

Calvin was most probably not aware of these events when he wrote his dedication to Frederick II in January 1554, but he surely vented his anger about it soon afterwards. On April 5, 1554, he wrote a letter to Bullinger, questioning the advantages that Bullinger claimed to have secured from the king of Denmark. In the light of the inhumane treatment of a Lasco and his crowd of exiles by the Danes, Calvin failed to see that any advantage could be gained from such a king.¹⁴² In May of the same year Calvin personally wrote to a Lasco, claiming that the adventures, which a Lasco had to endure, would make an admirable subject for a narrative. Still, it was with the saddest and bitterest feelings that Calvin learned about the cruelty of the Danes. Although he fears for the vengeance of God on the king, Calvin's wrath is especially directed against the ministers. He sees this incidence as a spectacle to the Papists.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ English translation from J.W. Fraser and W.J.G. McDonald, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, Acts 1-13* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 1.

¹³⁸ COR XII/1,3,9-11.

¹³⁹ COR XII/1,3,18-19.

¹⁴⁰ This reason is given in the prolegomena to Acts in CO 48,III. See in this regard also O.P. Grell, *The Scandinavian Reformation, from Evangelical Movement to Institutionalisation of Reform* (Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8; O.P. Grell, 'Exile and Tolerance', in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, ed. O.P. Grell and B. Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 173.

¹⁴¹ See W. van't Spijker, 'Calvijn over de Handelingen der Apostelen', *De Wekker* 92 (1982/83): 139-140.

¹⁴² CO 15,95.

¹⁴³ CO 15,143.

The abovementioned rededication of the commentary on Acts is certainly worth noting and discussing. However, the significance of it should not be overstressed. Firstly, the rededication does not take away the fact that Calvin consciously dedicated the original edition of his commentary to the king of Denmark and his son, men who were actively involved in the political and religious scene of the Holy Roman Empire in the 1540's. As has already been shown, this has significance for linking the commentary on Acts with other, related writings, and thus placing Calvin's commentary on Acts in its correct historical context.

And secondly, with the exception of some additions and minor changes (necessitated by the new context), the dedicatory letter to Nicolaus Radziwil is for the most part a combination of large portions of the original dedications addressed to Christian III and Frederick II.¹⁴⁴ This shows that, in his description of the importance and purpose of the book of Acts, Calvin still held the same views roughly eight years later. The dedicatee might have changed, but the dedication and its message remained the same.

1.4. Play on the Acts of the Apostles

A very interesting little piece of information that needs to be added to the description of the context is that in 1546 a play, based on the Acts of the Apostles, was performed in Geneva. Although this hardly could have had any significant bearing on Calvin's decision to start preaching and commenting on Acts in 1549, it does fill in the picture of all the events and aspects that lead up to his decision and adds a surprising form in which the book of Acts featured.

On April 16, 1546, the city discussed the possibility of presenting a play based on *The Acts of the Apostles*.¹⁴⁵ This play was written by the Frenchman, Simon Greban, possibly based on a mystery play composed by a doctor of theology in the mid-fifteenth century. It had already been performed in Bourges in 1536, as well as in Paris a few years later.¹⁴⁶ Abel Poupin, one of the Genevan ministers, shortened the extremely long play, but it would still require two weeks' time and almost 550 actors to perform.

In two separate letters to Farel Calvin expressed himself about this matter. On June 3, 1546, he wrote that this performance did not have all the ministers' approval, but at the same time

¹⁴⁴ See for a discussion of the differences and similarities of the dedicatory letters, J.W. Fraser and W.J.G. McDonald, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, Acts 1-13*, 1-16.

¹⁴⁵ See W.G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 98.

¹⁴⁶ See F.M. Higman, *Piety and the People: Religious Printing in French, 1511-1551* [St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History] (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), 234.

he realised that one cannot deny people every one of their amusements.¹⁴⁷ Eventually all the ministers decided that the city council would be advised to allow the play. The date for the performance was set for July 4. However, Michael Cop did not adhere to this decision, and on June 28, 1546, he used the pulpit to seriously admonish the actors. This nearly caused a great tumult in the city. Shortly afterwards Calvin wrote about this to Farel: “Our plays narrowly escaped being converted into tragedy... When the day was coming on, Michael, who had done so once before, instead of preaching, inveighed against the actors.”¹⁴⁸ Calvin continues to describe how the events unfolded until they were finally resolved. Eventually the play took place, but whether Calvin himself watched it, is not known.

1.5. Situation in Geneva

What was the situation in Geneva during the time when Calvin decided to work on the Acts of the Apostles? With one eye firmly fixed on the broader context of the Holy Roman Empire and the struggle against the Papists, one can easily close the other eye for the fact that Calvin was first and foremost the minister of Geneva. This is where he preached and taught daily. Was there not a more ‘local’ reason for taking up Acts? In this paragraph the situation in Geneva, especially during the second half of the 1540’s, will be discussed.¹⁴⁹

Factionalism played a huge part in Genevan history from the 1530’s until Calvin’s victory in the mid 1550’s. The political, social and religious situation within the city attributed greatly to this factionalism. And every time a faction triumphed over rival groups, that faction tended to collapse into new factions, which in turn lead to a new crisis.¹⁵⁰ This factionalism was part of the fibre of the city of Geneva, the city to which Calvin returned in 1541. However, it must be understood that this factionalism and the domestic problems in Geneva during the decade after Calvin’s return were directly related to the presence or absence of external pressures on the city. Indeed, the political and religious differences within Geneva were deep-seated and always present, but they often subsided when external pressure forced the Genevans to stand together. This applies in particular to the second half of the 1540’s.

¹⁴⁷ CO 12,347.

¹⁴⁸ CO 12,355-356.

¹⁴⁹ Most of the information for this paragraph I will derive from W.G. Naphy’s brilliant study, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁰ W.G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 7.

During the course of 1546 the ministers, whom by that time had been forged into a unified and stable ministerial body¹⁵¹, were heading for a major clash with the political leadership of Geneva. Several incidents, under which Calvin's refusal to accept Jean Trollet as minister, the affair of Pierre Ameaux, the drama surrounding the play on the Acts of the Apostles, and other minor squabbles, all added to the pressure.¹⁵² Not that there were no problems before 1546, but those problems were masked mainly by the external threat of conflict with Berne and the advent of the plague, which occupied the attention of the magistrates and the ministers throughout the period 1543-1545. But with the removal of these external concerns, the internal tensions mentioned above came to the fore. From Calvin's perspective these internal issues were mainly due to the unwillingness of, at least, some Genevan inhabitants to repent from their sinful ways and start living godly lives. However, from the perspective of the involved Genevans the French ministers were arrogant and acting beyond their boundaries.¹⁵³ Here we see the first signs of the xenophobia against the growing power and influence of the French in Geneva.¹⁵⁴

But then, during July of 1546, the news came that the emperor was about to attack the Protestant cities with 100 000 men. For a city that was ever conscious of its vulnerable geographical and political position between France, the emperor and Savoy, this was bad news.¹⁵⁵ Geneva started preparing for war. On the positive side, however, the external threat united the city and calmed the domestic situation in an astonishing way. Suddenly the exchanging of charges, the squabbling, the continuous slandering of the French ministers and the subsequent protesting by the ministers subsided. Geneva's attention had been turned to something much more pressing and important, and the magistrates did everything possible to present a unified front to any foreign threat. Despite a few domestic crises and simmering tensions, the situation in Geneva remained calm throughout the years 1547 and 1548. All ears were pricked to receive the latest news on the progress of the emperor against the German Protestants.¹⁵⁶

On August 29, 1548, exactly a year before Calvin started preaching on the book of Acts, news arrived that the emperor, the pope and the French king had signed a treaty. This co-operation

¹⁵¹ W.G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 53-83.

¹⁵² W.G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 94-99; see also W.H.Th. Moehn, *God Calls Us to His Service*, 23-24.

¹⁵³ W.G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 99-100.

¹⁵⁴ W.G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 121-143.

¹⁵⁵ W.H.Th. Moehn, *God Calls Us to His Service*, 27-28, gives a good summary of the political intricacies of these years.

¹⁵⁶ W.G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 100-104.

between Geneva's three most dangerous enemies was followed by several imperial victories over protestant cities. By April 1549 Geneva was bracing itself for, what seemed like, an inevitable war. However, the *Augsburg Interim* of May 1549 brought some peace in this volatile situation. By the end of 1549 things looked a lot better, which for Geneva also meant that domestic problems started emerging again.¹⁵⁷

By then, however, Calvin had already started preaching and commenting on Acts. In light of what was described above, the decision to work on Acts could therefore not have been primarily motivated by the internal situation of Geneva, as this situation would at that stage have been quiet for some time, albeit superficially, due to external pressures. It would rather have been the various confessional wars of the late 1540's that were keeping Calvin's attention. This situation might also have contributed to his reasons for focussing on the book of Acts.

Of course, as the situation changed and the internal problems started surfacing again, this could have been reflected in Calvin's work on Acts, especially in his weekly sermons to the inhabitants of Geneva. But this does not change the fact that Calvin started his work on the commentary on Acts with his primary focus on the German Protestants and their struggle to remain true to the new faith.

1.6. Conclusion

In summary I propose that Calvin's commentary on Acts lies in the line of the ecclesiastical and political events in Europe during the 1540's; it has as its primary focus the reformation of the church, and therefore has a strong anti-Papal colour. This proposition was initially born out of interest for the question why Calvin, after having finished his commentaries on the letters of the New Testament, turned his attention to Acts rather than to the Gospels. Subsequently, this hesitant proposition took on more shape when it became clear that there is a link between the commentary on Acts and the four polemical writings of the 1540's, both in context and in content. This proposition was, thereafter, strengthened by the dedications of the commentaries to persons involved in the exact same context, and it was finally underlined by an investigation into the local situation in Geneva.

¹⁵⁷ W.G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 105.

The context, as described in this chapter, must be kept in mind while reading and examining the commentary on Acts. It gives a clear direction as to how Calvin wanted his comments to be interpreted and applied to the situation of his own time.

PART 2
SETTING UP THE COMMENTARY

2. COMPARATIVE MATERIAL ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

2.1. Introduction

In comparison with other books of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles attracted relatively few commentators in early and medieval times, although it was usually included in any comprehensive gloss of the Bible.¹

This comment by Elsie Anne McKee is a fair reflection of the exegetical work done on the book of Acts until the sixteenth century. It seems that McKee's comment can also be applied to the general use of this book in the church, at least during the first four centuries. For although this book was read in the churches in the season between Easter and Pentecost, it was not often preached on.² It is, therefore, not strange to read that John Chrysostom starts his first sermon on this book in 400 AD with the acknowledgement that this book is so little known by many that they are not even aware that such a book exists.³ And what is true of the actual exegetical work done on the book of Acts during early and medieval times also seems to be true of the description of this exegetical work by later generations. P.F. Stuehnenberg says that the first fifteen centuries of the Christian era receives little attention in histories of Biblical scholarship, and that this is particularly true in the case of the book of Acts.⁴ W. Gasque, for example, can deal with the pre-Reformation period in a single paragraph, calling everything before the Enlightenment "the pre-critical study of the book of Acts."⁵ And E. Haenchen, in his commentary on the book of Acts, starts his extensive review of the history of the study of Acts with the historical-critical period at the end of the eighteenth century.⁶

¹ E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, N° CXC VII] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), 69.

² P. Schaff, *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans* [A Select Library of the Christian Church. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, first series, volume 11] (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), ix-x.

³ J. Chrysostom, *Commentarius in Acta Apostolorum*, MPG 60 (1862), 13.

⁴ P.F. Stuehnenberg, 'The Study of Acts Before the Reformation: a Bibliographic Introduction', *Novum Testamentum* XXIX, no. 2 (1987): 100.

⁵ W. Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* [Beiträge zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese, XVII] (Tübingen: Mohr, 1975), 7-8.

⁶ E. Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 11ff. Haenchen does mention the witnesses in the early church that attest to the existence of Acts and its author, 1-11.

This does not mean, however, that nothing can be said about the study of Acts in the early and medieval church. Bieder⁷, Mattill⁸, Gasque⁹ and Stuehrenberg¹⁰ all produce lists, growing as each one builds on the others, of early and medieval authors that had commented or preached on parts of Acts or on the book as a whole. The vast majority of these works does not exist anymore, either in manuscript or in printed editions, and they are known only through their use in later sources. The different *catenae* seem to be the best source from which knowledge of early authors can be gained.¹¹

In the sixteenth century considerably more interest in the Acts of the Apostles is noticeable. Mattill and Mattill list at least forty-five general studies on the book of Acts published during the sixteenth century, without specifying whether the authors were from Roman Catholic, Reformed or Anabaptist conviction.¹² A main reason for this interest could be the Renaissance motto: *ad fontes*, back to the sources, also with regards to the view on the apostles and the church.

From Protestant side the commentaries of *inter alia* Justus Jonas (1524), Heinrich Bullinger (1533, 1535 and 1536), Erasmus Sarcer (1540) and Joachim Camerarius (1556) can be mentioned. The homilies on Acts by Johannes Brenz (1533) are also worth noting. From Roman Catholic side the commentaries of Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1532), Arias Montanus (1575) and Benedictus Aretius (1583) can be noted.¹³ No known commentaries from the side of the Anabaptists have survived. In general it can be said that the Anabaptists wrote very few formal commentaries, and even less were published. What was written was often hand-copied and circulated within closed communities. This is the reason why Chung-Kim and Hains, in their Reformation Commentary on the book of Acts, have to resort to article books and confessions of faith in order to gauge something of the Anabaptists' position on this part of

⁷ W. Bieder, *Die Apostelgeschichte in der Historie. Ein Beitrag zur Auslegungsgeschichte des Missionsbuch der Kirche* [Theologische Studien, LXI] (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1960).

⁸ A.J. Mattill and M. Bedford Mattill, *A Classified Bibliography of Literature on the Acts of the Apostles* [New Testament Tools and Studies, VII] (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

⁹ W. Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* [Beiträge zur Geschichte der Biblischen Exegese, XVII] (Tübingen: Mohr, 1975).

¹⁰ P.F. Stuehrenberg, 'The Study of Acts Before the Reformation: a Bibliographic Introduction', *Novum Testamentum* XXIX, no. 2 (1987): 100-136.

¹¹ P. Schaff, *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, xii, where the author of the preface says that the expositions of St. Clement of Alexandria, Origin, Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ammonius and others whose materials are used in the catena, have perished.

¹² A.J. and M. Bedford Mattill, *A Classified Bibliography of Literature on the Acts of the Apostles*, 6-94. Compare this to the roughly 130 bits and pieces of writings in the preceding fourteen centuries as identified by Stuehrenberg, 'The Study of Acts Before the Reformation', 100-136.

¹³ W. Bieder, *Die Apostelgeschichte in der Historie*, 11-14.

Scripture. They choose Dirk Philips's *Enchiridion*, Peter Walpot's *Great Article Book*, and Peter Riedemann's *Confession of Faith*.¹⁴

2.2. Choice of comparative material

In order to ascertain how Calvin's commentary on Acts relates to or distinguishes itself from other exegetical work on Acts from that time as well as the preceding exegetical tradition, a choice of comparative material needs to be made. Ideally material should be chosen that represent both the preceding tradition as well as the exegesis of Calvin's own time. John Chrysostom and Desiderius Erasmus were chosen for this purpose. In addition, the conclusions of chapter 1 of this study imply that a commentary from a specific Roman Catholic perspective could supply the necessary backdrop for Calvin's commentary. For this purpose the commentary by Thomas de Vio Cajetan was chosen.

2.2.1. John Chrysostom

The Greek church father, John Chrysostom (344/354-407), during the third year of his stay in Constantinople (400 AD), produced a series of fifty-five sermons on the book of Acts that is considered to be "the only complete commentary on Acts that has survived from the first ten centuries."¹⁵ These sermons were very influential during the Middle Ages and often served as the basis for subsequent commentaries.¹⁶ The fact that Chrysostom's homilies is the only surviving commentary on Acts from the first ten centuries provides reason enough in itself to use them as comparative material to John Calvin's commentary on Acts.

However, there is more that justifies the choice for Chrysostom. In his extensive studies on Calvin's use of the church fathers, A.N.S. Lane has shown that, although Calvin predominantly uses the Western fathers, Chrysostom is his favourite Greek father, especially when it comes

¹⁴ E. Chung-Kim and T.R. Hains, ed., *Acts* [Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI] (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), lxi-lxiii.

¹⁵ J. Quasten, *Patrology* III (Westminster: the Newman Press, 1960), 440; see also P. Schaff, *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, xii. On the problems surrounding the text of this work, see P. Schaff, *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, ix-xi; J. Quasten, *Patrology* III, 441; P.F. Stuehnenberg, 'The Study of Acts Before the Reformation', 110.

¹⁶ P.F. Stuehnenberg, 'The Study of Acts Before the Reformation', 110; the author of the preface to Chrysostom's homilies in P. Schaff, *Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, x, indicates that of the *catena* on Acts, compiled by Andreas Presbyter, a large portion is taken from Chrysostom, and in turn the contents of the commentaries of Oecumenius (990) and Theophylact (1077) are in many places taken from the *catena*, implying thereby that the latter commentaries are also derived from Chrysostom.

to New Testament exegesis.¹⁷ This is confirmed by Calvin himself in the preface to the intended publication of Chrysostom's sermons. A few words on this aborted project and the existing preface are in order.

Calvin seems to have had a plan to publish a supposedly French edition of Chrysostom's sermons. He starts his preface by stating that the publishing of this kind of work is unconventional (*inuitatus*) and innovative (*in rebus novis*).¹⁸ What makes it unconventional and innovative is not the publication of Chrysostom itself; after all, many new Latin editions of patristic literature were being published during that time.¹⁹ And Calvin himself was, among others, in possession of Claude Chevallon's 1536 Paris edition of Chrysostom's *Opera Omnia*, on which he made extensive notes.²⁰ This project was unconventional, because Calvin most probably wanted to publish Chrysostom in the vernacular, French. In the preface Calvin gives at least three indications for this.

Firstly, he reminds his readers of the protests that were raised when it was suggested that the Gospel should be read by the public, but since then the objections have changed into approval, thereby implying that his unconventional project would in time also be approved. Secondly, he says that ordinary Christians should not be denied the resources for the understanding of the Word of God (which would have been the case if it was in Latin). And thirdly, he acknowledges that not all pastors and teachers are competent in the classical languages, explicitly mentioning Greek and Latin, and therefore a translation would be beneficial to them as well.²¹ In addition it can also be mentioned that someone other than Calvin added a title at the head of the manuscript, while a third hand inserted the word '*gall[icam]*', which, although subsequently deleted again, could still serve as a possible indication of Calvin's intention to publish these sermons in French.²² Although the project never materialized, Calvin wanted to

¹⁷ A.N.S. Lane, *John Calvin, Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 41. See also C.K. Barrett, 'Calvino esegeta degli Atti degli Apostoli', *Protestantesimo* 49 (1994): 318-321.

¹⁸ *Epistola* 74, COR VI,1,400,1-3.

¹⁹ W.I.P. Hazlett, 'Calvin's Preface to Chrysostom's Homilies', in *Humanism and Reform: the Church in Europe, England, and Scotland, 1400-1643*, ed. J. Kirk (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 130.

²⁰ A.N.S. Lane, *John Calvin, Student of the Church Fathers*, 12; see also A. Ganoczy and K. Müller, *Calvins Handschriftliche Annotationen zu Chrysostomus* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981). J. Kreijkes, 'Calvin's Use of the Chevallon Edition of Chrysostom's *Opera Omnia*', *Church History and Religious Culture* 96(3) (2016): 237-265, argues against Ganoczy and Müller that the Chevallon edition was certainly not the only text available to Calvin. This argument will only strengthen the thesis that Calvin did not plan to publish Chrysostom in Latin, but in French, as he already had more than one Latin text at his disposal.

²¹ *Epistola* 74, COR VI,1,400,9-16 & 401,51-53 & 402,88-90.

²² W.I.P. Hazlett, 'Calvin's Preface to Chrysostom's Homilies', 130.

publish aids in the vernacular, for pastors as well as for the laity, to facilitate the reading of Scripture.

This begs the question as to the reason why Calvin specifically chose Chrysostom for this purpose. The reformer gives a clear answer. He says that in the area of the interpretation of Scripture (*scripturae interpretatio*) no one of sound judgment can deny that our Chrysostom excels all the ancient writers currently extant (*in qua Chrysostomum nostrum vetustos omnes scriptores qui hodie exstant antecedere nemo sani iudicii negaverit*), and that this is especially true when he deals with the New Testament (*Praesertim ubi novum testamentum tractat*).²³ Among the Greeks Origin, Athanasius, Basil and Gregory are singled out as exegetes of distinction, but still Calvin criticises at least three of them. Of those in the next generation Cyril is counted as an outstanding exegete (*egregius sane interpres*), second to Chrysostom, but he is not able to match the man with the golden mouth. Everything good about Theophylact was taken from Chrysostom, Calvin says. No one among the Latin writers come close to Chrysostom. Even Augustine, who surpasses everyone in dogmatics and who is a scrupulous biblical commentator of the first rank, is far too ingenious, resulting in him being less sound and reliable. For Calvin Chrysostom is number one in biblical exegesis among the ancient writers, because he does not deviate from the plain meaning of Scripture, and does not twist the straightforward sense of the words.²⁴ This was, of course, also Calvin's own ideal for interpreting Scripture. Lucid brevity (*perspicua brevitatis*) was the greatest virtue of an expositor, and it was his main task to expound the line of thought of the writer – thus writes Calvin to Simon Grynaeus in 1539.²⁵ So, despite the differences between Calvin and Chrysostom on doctrines such as human free will, election, good works, justification and the Christian's responsibility in his own calling, Calvin encouraged the reading of Chrysostom, specifically by theological students.²⁶

In addition to the exegetical powers of Chrysostom, Calvin also finds valuable historical material in the homilies. From this historical material insight can be gained into how the office and authority of the bishops functioned at that time, how the discipline functioned among the

²³ *Epistola* 74, COR VI,1,403,104-107.

²⁴ *Epistola* 74, COR VI,1,403-405,100-145; see also R.J. Mooi, *Het Kerk- en Dogmahistorisch Element in de Werken van Johannes Calvin* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1965), 278-279.

²⁵ Dedication to the commentary on Romans, COR II/XIII,3-6; Calvin probably writes his dedication to the commentary on Romans at around the same time that his preface to Chrysostom's homilies was written; on the dating of the preface, see W.I.P. Hazlett, 'Calvin's Preface to Chrysostom's Homilies', 132-133. On Calvin's hermeneutic and his reliance on Chrysostom, see R.C. Gamble, '*Brevitas et facilitas*, Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic', *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 8-9.

²⁶ R.C. Gamble, '*Brevitas et facilitas*', 9.

clergy and the laity, what the characteristics of their meetings were, and what kind of ceremonies they had.²⁷ Calvin then concludes: “If we want helpful discussion on the welfare of the church, no more appropriate way is to be found, at least in my opinion, than to resort to the model from the early church.”²⁸ This applies specifically to the pastors of the church; they have to know what the nature of the ancient form of the church was (*vetusta ecclesiae facies*).²⁹ Calvin’s view on the importance of the book of Acts, namely that it paints a picture of the beginning of the church (see chapter 3), is in full compliance with the benefit that he finds in Chrysostom’s homilies. It is therefore remarkable that both Calvin and Chrysostom, when speaking about the value of the book of Acts, call it a treasure (*thesaurus*).³⁰ Could it, therefore, be possible that Calvin specifically intended a French translation of Chrysostom’s homilies on the book of Acts?³¹ After all, no other book of the New Testament provides so much information on the nature of the ancient form of the church and knowledge of antiquity as the book of Acts. And the book of Acts is the only New Testament book with extensive historical material on the offices, discipline among the clergy and the people, ecclesial meetings, different ceremonies and other things “really worth knowing about”.

The above clearly shows the value of Chrysostom’s homilies on Acts as comparative material. His unique position in the exegesis of Acts in the first ten centuries, Calvin’s high regard for him as an expositor of the New Testament, and his proximity to the early church make him an ideal candidate. Through Chrysostom’s homilies on Acts it could also be possible to gauge Calvin’s engagement with the exegetical tradition.

Are there any indications in Calvin’s commentary on Acts that he made use of Chrysostom’s homilies? According to Feld, in his introduction to the critical edition of Calvin’s commentary on Acts, the Genevan reformer only seldom refers to Chrysostom, mostly to distance himself critically from the Greek father.³² At first glance, this seems to be true. Calvin only explicitly

²⁷ *Epistola* 74, COR VI,I,407,221-230.

²⁸ *Epistola* 74, COR VI,I,407,431-433: *Nam si volumus ecclesiae saluti bene consultum, nulla reperietur magis idonea ratio, mea quidem opinione, quam si disciplinae normam a veteri ecclesia petamus*. Translation from Hazlett, ‘Calvin’s Preface to Chrysostom’s Homilies’, 150.

²⁹ *Epistola* 74, COR VI,I,403,91-93.

³⁰ Chrysostom in the beginning of his first homily (MPG 60,13-14), and Calvin in the last words of his *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,14,20.

³¹ N.G. Awad, ‘The Influence of John Chrysostom’s Hermeneutics on John Calvin’s Exegetical Approach to Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63, no. 4 (2010): 422 & 428, presupposes that it was Calvin’s intention to translate Chrysostom’s homilies on the Epistle to the Romans, even attributing this presupposition to Hazlett, ‘Calvin’s Preface to Chrysostom’s Homilies’. However, nowhere does Calvin say exactly which homilies he wanted to translate, and Hazlett gives no indication either.

³² H. Feld, ed., *Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum* COR XII/1 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2001), XXI-XXII.

refers to Chrysostom three times³³ – twice he disagrees with him, and once he concedes that Chrysostom’s explanation is not out of line with Luke’s intention.³⁴ One has to take into account, however, what Lane, in his extensive study on Calvin’s use of the church fathers, says in Thesis IV: “In the commentaries a negative comment may be a mark of respect and may serve as a pointer to Calvin’s sources.”³⁵ The fact that Calvin only seldom explicitly refers to Chrysostom, as well as the fact that he is critical of Chrysostom in two of the three instances, does not mean that Calvin distances himself from Chrysostom. The opposite might actually be true.

2.2.2. Desiderius Erasmus

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) was a constant presence in Calvin’s exegetical work, albeit not in person.³⁶ Erasmus’ text of the Greek New Testament with Latin translation and *Annotationes* was a standard part of Calvin’s tools when writing his commentaries. Even if Parker is correct in concluding that the text printed by Simon de Colines in 1534, which is mainly a collation of Erasmus’ third edition of 1522 corrected by the Complutensian Polyglot, was Calvin’s working text for several years, this only applies until about 1548. In the commentaries printed after about 1548 Calvin clearly seems to have switched over to Erasmus’ fourth edition of 1527. The reasons for this switch cannot be ascertained conclusively.³⁷ But it does mean that, for the commentary on Acts (published in two parts in 1552 and 1554 respectively), Calvin had Erasmus’ Greek text in front of him on a continuous basis.

With regards to the Latin text the same can be said. For his commentaries Calvin provided his own Latin translation of the (Greek, in the case of Acts) text, but he certainly had one of Erasmus’ Latin versions (with the *Annotationes*) as well as the Vulgate in front of him. This can be seen from the fact that he often refers explicitly, in agreement or disagreement, to the translation of either Erasmus or the Vulgate (often called *vetus interpres*), or sometimes even to both³⁸, in order to justify his own translation. Calvin’s aim was to give a faithful translation

³³ See Calvin’s commentary on Acts 8:33, 8:36 and 18:3.

³⁴ H. Feld, ed., *Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum* COR XII/1, 257 (footnote 54), denies that Calvin’s discussion of Chrysostom in Acts 8:33 is in fact Chrysostom’s view, but rather Jerome’s; see also Feld’s footnotes in the commentary on Acts 2:42, 8:13, 8:24, 14:22 and 23:5, where he sees implicit references to Chrysostom.

³⁵ A.N.S. Lane, *John Calvin, Student of the Church Fathers*, 4.

³⁶ See here also W.H.Th. Moehn, ‘Calvin as Commentator on the Acts of the Apostles’, in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. D.K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 203-204.

³⁷ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1993), 123-157. See Parker’s conclusions on page 153.

³⁸ See for examples of this in Calvin’s commentary on Acts: Acts 2:22, 8:21, 13:42, 15:8, 15:14, 16:13, 16:22, 24:2, 24:40.

of the text that could serve as the basis for his comments. Where the Vulgate achieved that aim, he used the Vulgate; where Erasmus' translation was better he followed Erasmus; when neither satisfied him he made his own translation. In the same way he also made use of Erasmus' *Annotationes*.³⁹

What is worth noting is Calvin's gradual shift away from Erasmus, not so much in the frequency with which Calvin uses Erasmus, but more in his decreasing dependency on the Dutch humanist.⁴⁰ Calvin's initial attitude towards Erasmus' Latin translation was respectful and his criticism mild, but this gradually changed as his judgements became harsher. This criticism, however, need not be viewed negatively altogether. When Calvin criticises Erasmus, he clearly feels the need to justify himself towards such an esteemed authority.⁴¹ In his commentary on Acts Calvin explicitly refers to Erasmus 25 times, mostly in disagreement, but there are also a number of times when he agrees with Erasmus.⁴² These references almost exclusively pertain to philological and translational issues, rather than to doctrinal issues.

The choice in this study for Erasmus' *Paraphrases* on Acts rather than his *Annotationes* is brought about by the nature of these respective works. Erasmus' *Annotationes*, which accompanied the different editions of his New Testament, focused on textual criticism and patristic and medieval exegesis rather than on proper exposition. In the preface to the 1519 edition Erasmus himself said: "We are not writing commentaries, but little notes [*annotatiunculas*], and really only those which pertain to the correctness of the text."⁴³ His *Paraphrases* on the other hand "constitute the practical, pastoral application of Erasmus' scholarship in the service of promoting piety."⁴⁴

Erasmus's *Paraphrases* on Acts was published in February 1524 by Johann Froben in Basel. Shortly before that, on January 31, 1524, Erasmus wrote the dedicatory letter, addressed to Pope Clement VII, who was a member of the influential Medici family. Erasmus thought it fitting that Luke the physician (*medicus*) should go to a Medici. The fitness of this dedication was, however, not merely a matter of name-play. Erasmus also connected the dedication to a Medici to the state of the church in his own day. Against the wonderful picture of the church

³⁹ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 164-184, 190-191.

⁴⁰ H. Feld, ed., *Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum*, COR XII/1, XXI.

⁴¹ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 164-169.

⁴² See Acts 1:3, 1:4, 2:22, 3:18, 3:26, 7:5, 7:19, 7:38, 8:21, 9:15, 9:29, 12:20, 13:33, 13:42, 15:8, 15:14, 16:13, 16:22, 17:29, 22:3, 22:14, 22:17, 24:2, 24:20, 26:28.

⁴³ Translation from T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 175.

⁴⁴ H.M. Pabel, 'Retelling the History of the Early Church: Erasmus' Paraphrase on Acts', *The American Society of Church History* 69:1 (2000): 64.

given by Luke in the book of Acts, Erasmus sees that the church of his time is in a corrupt and turbulent state. Therefore he offers the foundations of the newborn church to the one man through whom there was hope that the church in ruins would be reborn and restored.⁴⁵ Erasmus conveys the same message to all the believers. At the beginning of his *Annotationes* on Acts Erasmus remarks that it is of the utmost importance for Christians to become familiar with the infancy of their religion so that they may understand that the same measures, which were responsible for its initial growth, must be again employed to bring about its renewal.⁴⁶ Erasmus is clearly aware of the chasm between the past of the early church and the present of his own time, but he proposes sacred history as a model and as a remedy for the present.⁴⁷

Only a brief look at Erasmus' view on the book of Acts, as seen from the remarks in the previous paragraph, reminds one very much of elements in Calvin's *Argumentum* and commentary on Acts. Elements like the beginning of the church, the concept of restoration and the role of sacred history as a model for the present all play an important role in Calvin's commentary, as will be explored in chapters 3 and 4. These similarities as well as the above-mentioned importance of Erasmus' Greek and Latin texts make his *Paraphrases* very suitable as comparative material.

One more element could be added. As part of his impressive list of patristic editions, Erasmus also edited the works of Chrysostom (1525, 1527, 1530). From the prefaces to these editions it becomes clear that Erasmus harbours a similar appreciation for Chrysostom as Calvin had. In his preaching Chrysostom adapted his discourse to the comprehension of the common people. And Scripture, even the obscure passages, became easy to understand when expounded by him. These traits made Chrysostom a model bishop in the view of Erasmus.⁴⁸ This link with Chrysostom, which Erasmus shared with Calvin, makes him even more suitable to use.

⁴⁵ Preface to Erasmus' *Paraphrases* on Acts, in *Collected Works of Erasmus* (CWE) 50,2-4.

⁴⁶ A. Reeve and M.A. Screech, ed., *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament, Acts – Romans – I and II Corinthians* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 271.

⁴⁷ H.M. Pabel, 'Retelling the History of the Early Church', 65-66.

⁴⁸ I. Backus, 'Erasmus and the Spirituality of the Early Church', in *Erasmus' Vision of the Church*, ed. H.M. Pabel [Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, volume XXXIII] (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1995), 105-106.

2.2.3. Thomas de Vio Cajetan

Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534) is in church history mostly remembered for his important position in the Roman Catholic Church during the first part of the sixteenth century⁴⁹, and even more for his role as Papal Legate at the diet of Augsburg in 1518, where he stood in opposition to Martin Luther. It was his task to elicit from Luther a revocation of his heresies, something in which he failed. A few years later he was part of the commission that drew up the formal condemnation of Luther's teaching that eventually led to the Wittenberg reformer's excommunication.⁵⁰ His commentary on Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* is considered to be his *magnum opus*, and therefore he is often exclusively seen as a scholastic theologian. However, what is sometimes forgotten are Cajetan's biblical expositions. His intention was to write commentaries on all the books of the Bible⁵¹, but his death in 1534 meant that he could not finish this project. From 1524 until 1534 he expounded the Psalms (1527), the four Gospels (1527-8), the Pauline corpus (1528-9), Acts and the Catholic Epistles (1529), the Pentateuch (1530), the historical books from Joshua through Nehemiah (1531-2), Job (1533), Proverbs and Qohelet (1534), and the first three chapters of Isaiah before his death in August 1534.⁵² Cajetan's biblical work initially drew fierce criticism from some corners in the Roman Catholic Church, most notably from the Parisian Theological Faculty, who prepared a list of errors for censure⁵³, as well as from Ambrosius Catharinus.⁵⁴

The reason for this criticism can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, Cajetan focussed on the literal sense in his commentaries, instead of the mystical sense as was usual in the Roman Catholic Church. He took note of the commentaries that were circulating at that time that

⁴⁹ Cajetan was Master General of the Dominican Order from 1508-1518 and became Cardinal in 1517. From 1523 onwards he was the trusted advisor of Pope Clement VII, who described him as the "lamp of the church", see A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, *Biblical Scholarship and the Church. A Sixteenth-century Crisis of Authority* (Aldershot / Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 150; J. Wicks, 'Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534)', in *The Reformation Theologians. An Introduction to Theology in the Early Modern Period*, ed. C. Lindberg (Oxford / Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 275-277.

⁵⁰ M. O'Connor, 'A Neglected Facet of Cardinal Cajetan: Biblical Reform in High Renaissance Rome', in *The Bible in the Renaissance. Essays on Biblical Commentary and Translation in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. R. Griffiths (Aldershot / Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), 71.

⁵¹ The Song of Songs and the Book of Revelation were not part of Cajetan's exegetical project; he admitted that their authors' original meanings were beyond his powers.

⁵² J. Wicks, 'Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534)', 279; see also R.C. Jenkins, *Pre-Tridentine Doctrine. A Review of the Commentary on the Scriptures of Thomas de Vio, Cardinal of St. Xystus, Commonly Called Cardinal Cajetan* (London: David Nutt, 1891).

⁵³ J. Wicks, 'Catholic Old Testament Interpretation in the Reformation and Early Confessional Eras', in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament, the History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 2, ed. M. Saebo (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 622-623.

⁵⁴ A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, *Biblical Scholarship and the Church*, 150-225; R.C. Jenkins, *Pre-Tridentine Doctrine*, 13.

championed the mystical sense and neglected the literal sense, but he instead looked for the original meaning of the text, provided that it did not differ from the rest of Scripture or the doctrine of the church. Cajetan, however, did not have a problem to differ from the holy doctors of the church, for God did not bind the exposition of Scripture to the meaning of the doctors.⁵⁵ A second reason for the criticism was the result of Cajetan's critical use of the Vulgate. Without rejecting the Vulgate's authority, he did not just accept its reading of a particular passage, but he went back to the Hebrew and Greek texts. Although Cajetan lacked the philological and linguistic qualities to evaluate the Hebrew and Greek texts, he employed knowledgeable assistants, and he also made use of recent Hebrew- and Greek-based translations.⁵⁶ In general it can also be said that, although Cajetan as a theologian was not trained in the humanist tradition, he nonetheless shared the humanist ideals. And thirdly, Cajetan's decision not to write commentaries on the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament, as they were inadmissible in determining the content of faith, was against the Roman Catholic understanding of the canon of Scripture. Cajetan learned this restrictive view of the biblical canon from Jerome, the one 'doctor' on whom he relied heavily.⁵⁷ These factors are well attested to by Cajetan himself in the preface to his commentary on the Pentateuch:

I entreat all my readers not too suddenly to repudiate anything, but to weigh everything by the Holy Scripture, by the truth of the Christian faith and by the evidence and customs of the Catholic Church. And if sometimes a new sense should appear, agreeable to the sacred text and not contrary to the doctrine of the church, although it be opposed to the whole stream of sacred doctors, that they will show themselves to be just censors... Let none therefore take offence at a new sense of the Scripture, because it is in disagreement with the ancient doctors, but scrutinise the text and context more closely, and if it fits them, let him praise God who has not tied up the exposition of the Scripture to the rule of the ancient doctors, but to that of the entire Scripture itself, under the judgment of the Catholic Church... I intend to expound the text according to the Hebrew verity, wherever a difference occurs between the Vulgate and the Hebrew

⁵⁵ J. Wicks, 'Catholic Old Testament Interpretation in the Reformation and Early Confessional Eras', 619.

⁵⁶ J. Wicks, 'Catholic Old Testament Interpretation in the Reformation and Early Confessional Eras', 618; A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, *Biblical Scholarship and the Church*, 155-156. Cajetan provided new Latin translations for all the Psalms as well as Genesis 1-3, and he noted numerous mistakes in the Vulgate's text of the Gospel of John and Paul's letter to the Romans.

⁵⁷ J. Wicks, 'Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534)', 280.

reading... For the Hebrew and not the Greek or Latin interpretation is authoritative, which we are compelled to embrace and which all the faithful do embrace.⁵⁸

It is often proposed that Cajetan's conflict with Luther at Augsburg showed him the importance of biblical exegesis based on the Hebrew and Greek texts, and thus his commentaries are thought to have been an instrument to counter the Reformation on purely biblical grounds. However, the content of the commentaries does not support this thesis. There are only four explicit references to 'Lutherans' in all of Cajetan's works, and he seldom uses classical texts to prove Catholic doctrine against the reformers, as one would have expected if he was indeed countering the Reformation.⁵⁹

For the reformers themselves, however, Cajetan would in a sense have been a breath of fresh air coming from Roman Catholic side. His literal exegesis as well as his stance on the Vulgate and the canon surely would have attracted their attention. When a copy of the Parisian Faculty of Theology's list of twenty-four errors found in Cajetan's work reached Wittenberg, Luther reacted with a short polemical writing in which he inveighed against the Parisians' attachment to the Vulgate and their blindness to Cajetan's insights into the New Testament. Also Calvin, although he only came on the scene a few years later, seems to have been very much aware of Cajetan's writings. This can be deduced from the fact that the writings of three Roman theologians occupied quite an amount of space in the library of the Academy of Geneva, including the exegetical, scholastic and polemical works of Cajetan and Catharinus.⁶⁰

All these facts taken into consideration, Cajetan's commentary on the Acts of the Apostles could be put to good use as comparative material to Calvin's commentary on Acts, especially as it comes from a Roman Catholic theologian playing a leading role in the church at that time. In Calvin's commentary there are no explicit references to Cajetan, although Feld identifies at least eight passages where he sees an implicit reference to Cajetan's commentary.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Translation from R.C. Jenkins, *Pre-Tridentine Doctrine*, 8-9.

⁵⁹ J. Wicks, 'Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534)', 279; M. O'Connor, 'A Neglected Facet of Cardinal Cajetan: Biblical Reform in High Renaissance Rome', 72-78.

⁶⁰ A. Ganoczy, *La Bibliothèque de l'Académie de Calvin* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1969), 95-99; see also J.-F. Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, transl. K. Maag [Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 72] (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2005), 141.

⁶¹ See footnotes by Feld to Calvin's commentary on Acts 7:30, 7:43, 9:32, 10:35, 19:5, 20:21, 21:37, 23:5.

3. CALVIN'S VIEW ON THE BOOK OF ACTS

After having explained and justified the choice of comparative material in chapter 2, it is time to start zooming in on Calvin's commentary on Acts. The question that will be discussed in this chapter, is: How does Calvin view the book of Acts? What are for him the specific characteristics (the *propria*¹) of this book? What distinguishes Acts from other books of the Bible? In order to answer these questions, and thereby setting up his commentary, Calvin mainly uses the *Argumentum* to his commentary², and to a lesser degree the dedicatory letters.³ Although not absent, the reader will find little conscious reflection on these 'preliminary' matters in the commentary proper.

3.1. A Christological benefit: the effect of Christ's death and resurrection

From the outset of his *Argumentum* Calvin makes it clear that he wants all the godly (*pii omnes*) to read the book of Acts. In order to promote the reading of Acts, Calvin sets himself the task of briefly showing the benefit (*utilitas*) of this history,⁴ something which he subsequently does. However, Calvin insists that he does not merely want to repeat those things that commonly (*communiter*) belong to all the sacred histories (*sacrae historiae*), but that he will only mention those things that are peculiar (*propria sunt*) to this specific book. For Calvin the things which are peculiar to this specific book, and which Luke sets down here, are great things and of extraordinary benefit (*magna sunt ac rarae utilitatis*)⁵ – again the word *utilitas* is used.

However, in his endeavours to show his readers the benefit of the book of Acts, the reformer is aware of the fact that Satan has always tried to erase the memory of this history from the minds of the believers; Satan either wants believers to forget about this history, or he tries to discredit this history in their minds. He does this by using people to infect the true historical facts with fictitious stories about the apostles and their actions.⁶ Satan wants to rob believers

¹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,17-19.

² With the *Argumentum* is meant the introduction in which Calvin sets out the background and theme of a particular book. For more on this, see R.A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21-38.

³ H. Feld, ed., *Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum* COR XII/1 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2001), XXIV, makes a similar observation.

⁴ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,1-3.

⁵ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,20.

⁶ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,13,23-29.

of any certainty about the history that followed Christ's ascension.⁷ This last statement is crucial to Calvin's understanding of the benefit of the book of Acts, as he immediately afterwards comes to the following conclusion:

So, if this record of Luke (*Lucae monumentum*) was not in existence, Christ could have appeared to have left no effect (*fructus*) of his death and resurrection on earth, after he had been lifted up to heaven. For everything would have vanished along with his body.⁸

Here Calvin comes to the core of what he views as the peculiar benefit of the book of Acts. The benefit of Acts has everything to do with the continuous effect (*fructus*) of Christ's earthly work after his ascension.⁹ The book of Acts provides its readers with concrete knowledge of the fruit that Christ's earthly work yielded after he ascended into heaven. That, to Calvin, is the most important benefit of this sacred history. Calvin's view on the benefit (the *utilitas*) of the book of Acts is, therefore, determined by his Christology, his view on the all-important place of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

After stating that, if Luke's record (*Lucae monumentum*) was not in existence, Christ could have appeared to have left no effect of his death and resurrection, Calvin goes on to describe what he considers to be the effect of Christ's earthly work after his ascension (starting every time with *nesciremus*): we would not have known that Christ was received into heavenly glory, while still maintaining his rule on earth; we would not have known that the doctrine of the Gospel was proclaimed through the ministry of the apostles, starting from Jerusalem and eventually reaching us (*ab ipsis ad nos*); we would not have known that the Spirit inspired (*afflatus*) the apostles so that they only taught what came from God.¹¹ In these different aspects Calvin explains what he sees as the effect of Christ's death and resurrection after his ascension. The first effect of Christ's death and resurrection after his ascension is that he was received into heavenly glory where he was declared as the highest King of heaven and earth,¹² while

⁷ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,14,8-9.

⁸ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,14,9-12.

⁹ See also Inst. 2.16.14-16, where Calvin speaks about the benefit of Christ's ascension, as well as his commentary on Acts 2:23, COR XII/1,64,29-30, where he speaks about the purpose (*finis*) and fruit (*fructus*) of the death of Christ in the context of the providence of God.

¹⁰ Also Calvin's doctrine of the Spirit is determined by his Christology; see W. Balke, 'Calvijn en de Pinksterprediking', in *Verbi Divini Minister*, ed. J. van Oort, A. de Reuver, and M. Verduin (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1983), 32-33; W. van't Spijker, 'Die Lehre vom Heiligen Geist bei Bucer und Calvin', in *Calvinus Servus Christi. Die Referate des Internationalen Kongresses für Calvinforschung vom 25. Bis 28 August 1986 in Debrecen*, ed. W.H. Neuser (Budapest: Presseabteilung des Raday-Kollegiums, 1988), 73-106.

¹¹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,14,12-17.

¹² *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,2-3.

still maintaining his rule on earth as the perpetual Governor (*gubernator*) of his church.¹³ Christ's ascension was, therefore, not his departure from this world, but rather his enthronement as King. "Ascension for Calvin means that Christ accepted his kingship and that already now, from the mystery of heaven, he governs his church and is near to it through Word and Spirit. With Calvin the ascension of Christ and his sitting at the right hand of the Father are the inauguration of the kingship of the exalted Lord."¹⁴ That is the reason why Calvin can say that the book of Acts depicts the beginning of his reign and, as it were, the renewal of the world.¹⁵

The second effect of Christ's death and resurrection after his ascension pertains to the spreading of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth through the ministry of the apostles. This effect actually contains three distinct and important aspects, namely the spreading of the Gospel, the central role of preaching and teaching, and the task of the apostles. Calvin quotes from Isaiah 2:3 to proof that the Word of the Lord would go out from Jerusalem, but from there, he says, it even reached us, although through a variety of hands.¹⁶ In fact, the whole world was brought into submission by the sound of the Gospel.¹⁷ This last statement immediately highlights the central role of preaching and teaching (the sound of the Gospel). The church only came into existence in its proper form (*legitima forma*) once the apostles, empowered by the Spirit, started preaching the death and resurrection of their Shepherd, Jesus Christ.¹⁸ With the humble sound of these human voices God achieved more than when he would have thundered from heaven.¹⁹ This, of course, says nothing about the apostles themselves, as they were men of no importance and endowed with no skill, but it rather shows the power of the preaching of the Gospel.²⁰ But still the apostles carried out with fortitude and steadfastness what was commanded them by God.²¹

The third effect of Christ's death and resurrection after his ascension has to do with the work of the Spirit. He was sent to the apostles from above as the fulfilment of Christ's promise and as proof of Christ's presence with and governance of his own.²² He was the new power that

¹³ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,23.

¹⁴ C. van der Kooi, 'Christology', in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 262.

¹⁵ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,26-27; see also Calvin's explanation of the ascension of Christ in Inst. 2.16.14.

¹⁶ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,14,14-19.

¹⁷ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,6-7.

¹⁸ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,29-31.

¹⁹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,11-14.

²⁰ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,5-6.

²¹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,29-31.

²² *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,21-25.

enabled the apostles to preach.²³ Although the work of the Spirit is mentioned as the final effect, it should not be understood as the least important. To the contrary, it is only through the outpouring of the Spirit that the apostles are able to preach the Gospel (second effect), by which we know that Christ governs his church from heaven as King (first effect). This order is, therefore, no argument to prematurely confirm the accusation levelled at Calvin by Volf and Lee in the introduction, namely that Calvin's Pneumatology does not feature significantly in the shaping of his ecclesiology.²⁴

In summary it can be said that, according to Calvin, the benefit (*utilitas*) of the book of Acts is that it gives a lively picture²⁵ (and thereby knowledge) of the effect (*fructus*) that Christ's work on earth had after he ascended into heaven. This effect is the royal reign of Christ from heaven, the coming of the Spirit, and the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles to the ends of the earth. In these aspects, as they are described in the book of Acts, Calvin sees the effect of Christ's death and resurrection after his ascension. His view on the benefit of this book is therefore primarily Christological in nature. For Calvin the book of Acts originated from the Holy Spirit, and must be regarded as a kind of vast treasure (*ingentis thesauri loco nobis habendum*).²⁶

3.2. An ecclesiological theme: the beginning of the church

The effects of Christ's death and resurrection on earth after his ascension – i.e. the reign of Christ from heaven, the coming of the Spirit, and the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles – takes its most visible shape in the theme of 'the beginning of the church'. Several times in the *Argumentum* to his commentary Calvin indicates 'the beginning of the church' as the theme of Acts.²⁷ Whereas secular history is generally praised as an 'instructress of life'²⁸, the sacred histories (*sacrae historiae*) deserve even more praise as it not only regulates the external life

²³ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,30.

²⁴ See the introduction to this study.

²⁵ Calvin's use of terms like *ostendunt*, *depingitur*, *recensetur* in his *Argumentum* indicates that, for him, Acts is not a static description, but rather a dynamic and lively picture. The same is also clear from the dedicatory letter to Radziwil (originally to Christian III), where Calvin says that Luke draws a living picture (*vivam utriusque effigiem in Actis Apostolorum quam expresse depingat Lucas*) of the teaching of the Gospel and the fellowship of the believers (COR, XII/1,5,7). Shortly afterwards he confirms this in a negative way when he says that the book of Acts does not give an empty picture (*inani pictura*) (COR, XII/1,5,13).

²⁶ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,14,20.

²⁷ See W.H.Th. Moehn, 'Calvin as Commentator on the Acts of the Apostles', in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. D.K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 213.

²⁸ Cicero, in *De Oratore* 2,9,36; also cited by Calvin in his commentary on Romans 4:23, COR II/XIII,98.

of man, but also shows that God has taken care of his church from the beginning (*ab initio*).²⁹ Thus, Acts is classified as sacred history, specifically telling its readers the narrative of the beginning church through the providential care of God.

Calvin goes on to define God's care for his beginning church more precisely as the beginning of the reign of Christ (*regni Christi initium*).³⁰ At his ascension Christ was declared as the highest King of heaven and earth³¹, and through the subsequent descent of the Holy Spirit he is present with his own and always governs his church.³² The ascension of Christ is the cause for the "origin and progress" (*origo et progressus*) of the church.³³ God's care for his beginning church is, therefore, not just something, but someone – Jesus Christ, the King of heaven and earth, through the presence of his Spirit. It is clear that the beginning of the reign of Christ (also called the beginning of the kingdom) and the beginning of the church are intricately connected.

Calvin, however, defines even further what he means by Christ's reign over his fledgling church. Before his ascension Christ had, of course, already gathered some of his church by his preaching, but "the Christian church began to exist (*extare coepit*) in its proper form (*legitima Christianae Ecclesiae forma*) only when the apostles were endowed with new power, and preached that that unique Shepherd had both died and been raised from the dead..."³⁴ For Calvin, therefore, the apostles' preaching of the Gospel through the power they received (i.e. the Holy Spirit), signals the true beginning of the church. On the contents of the apostles' preaching, Calvin does not digress much in the *Argumentum*. After merely mentioning the apostles' speeches and summarising its contents in a single paragraph, he summarily disposes of the topic (*ut doctrinae sanae et purae explicationem nunc omittam*), and rather recommends the book of Acts for its specific benefit of providing the reader with knowledge of the beginning of the Christian church (*quale fuerit Christianae Ecclesiae exordium*).³⁵

From the above it can be deducted that, for Calvin, the beginning of the church forms the central theme of the book of Acts. Calvin has a Christological view on the benefit of the book of Acts, but the theme of the book is ecclesiological. And, as has been stated above, the beginning of the church is intricately linked to the beginning of Christ's heavenly reign (i.e.

²⁹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,5-11.

³⁰ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,26-27; this link is established when Calvin says about the sacred histories that they show (*ostendunt*) that God has cared for his church from the beginning, and shortly afterwards says that the things that Luke sets down here depicts (*depingitur*) the beginning of the reign of Christ.

³¹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,1-2.

³² *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,23-24.

³³ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,2-3.

³⁴ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,27-30.

³⁵ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,13,13-15.

the beginning of his kingdom) as well as to the beginning of the apostles' preaching of the Gospel through the power of the Spirit. Thus, the beginning of the church as central theme in the book of Acts does not happen in isolation, but is linked to the ascension of Christ, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the proclamation by the apostles.

This theme ('the beginning of the church') receives a very specific application in the respective dedicatory letters that Calvin attached to this commentary.³⁶ In them he connects the beginning of the church as described in Acts, to an analogous beginning of the church in the country where the dedicatee played a substantial role. According to Calvin this connection serves to encourage the recipient of his commentary.³⁷

In the first dedication, to Christian III (1552), Calvin urges the king to strengthen his conscience by considering the pattern (*ratio*) and nature (*natura*), the state (*status*) and condition (*conditio*) that the kingdom of Christ had in the beginning (*ab initio*). Such a consideration will highlight two things in particular, namely the teaching of the Gospel by which Christ gathers and governs his church, as well as the fellowship of the believers. In the Acts of the Apostles Luke draws a living picture of both.³⁸

Eight years later (in 1560) Calvin re-uses the exact same words in his letter to Radziwil. After he has exhorted Radziwil, who embraced the pure teaching of the Gospel in the beginning (*initium*), to persevere to the end of this course³⁹, and has praised him for the services he rendered to the church in Poland in its beginning (*Ecclesiae primordium*)⁴⁰, he introduces the same encouragement as was originally given to Christian III. Calvin wants Radziwil to be encouraged and supported by looking at the kingdom of Christ as it was in the beginning (*ab initio*).⁴¹

In his dedication of the second part of his commentary on Acts to Frederick II (1554) Calvin explicitly states that he thought it suitable to connect (*coniungere*) the young crown prince to the narrative of Acts, which tells of the very beginnings of the church right from its actual birth (*quae prima ab ipsis usque natalibus ecclesiae christianae exordia*), and then its advances and increases. That is also the reason why Calvin decided to divide his commentary into two books,

³⁶ For the dedications, see chapter 1.3.

³⁷ See COR XII/1,LXIV-LXV (letter to Christian III; also taken up in the letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,4,29-30); COR XII/1,LXX (letter to Frederick II; also taken up in the letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,6,7-9).

³⁸ Letter to Christian III, COR XII/1,LXV.

³⁹ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,4,7-10.

⁴⁰ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,4,13-15.

⁴¹ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,5,1-3.

so that Frederick could also be part of the narrative. Frederick might be encouraged by the precise resemblance between the reborn church of Denmark (*ut ipsa renascentis ecclesiae*), which the Lord has committed to his protection, and the church in Acts.⁴² Only a few moments later Calvin stresses the same point again. It is particularly useful, he says, to look to the origin of the church (*in ecclesiae originem*) as Luke describes it. This usefulness lies in the portrayal of the wonderful power of God as well as the endurance of his servants.⁴³ As with the encouragement to Christian III, these words are also taken up verbatim in the dedication to Radziwil.⁴⁴

It is clear that Calvin's letters to the respective dedicatees, especially those addressed to Christian III and Frederick II as being the original dedicatees, were not detached from the contents of the accompanying commentary. Instead, they were intricately linked to, what Calvin deemed, the central theme of the book. The gap of fifteen centuries is bridged in order to link two beginning churches – the beginning church in Acts and the beginning church in Calvin's own time. The latter is urged to study and follow the example of the former.⁴⁵

3.2.1. More than one beginning

The question arises where exactly Calvin locates the beginning of the church. His strong emphasis on the beginning of the church in Acts could suggest that, for him, the church actually started at that time. However, Calvin fully acknowledges the existence of the church before the time of Acts. In the dedication of his commentary on Genesis to Duke Henry of Vendomme (1563), for example, he clearly states that God after the fall of humanity adopted to himself a church.⁴⁶ And in light of the abovementioned connection between the beginning of Christ's reign and the beginning of the church, it is significant that Calvin, in his dedicatory letter to Radziwil, says that the Son of God has always reigned as King from the beginning of the

⁴² Letter to Frederick II, COR XII/1,LXIX-LXX.

⁴³ Letter to Frederick II, COR XII/1,LXX.

⁴⁴ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,6,8-9.

⁴⁵ Calvin's exegetical method of bridging the gap between the biblical context and his own time is widely recognized, see e.g. W.H.Th. Moehn, 'Calvin as Commentator on the Acts of the Apostles', 202; W.J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 91; F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody: the Church, a History of Divine Protection* [Reformed Historical Theology, volume 12] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 11.

⁴⁶ Letter to Duke Henry of Vendomme, CO 20,119; see also comm. on Gen 11:10, CO 23,169. D. N. Wiley, 'The Church as the Elect' in *John Calvin and the Church. A Prism of Reform*, ed. T. George (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 100-105, proposes that election is the basis for Calvin's conviction that God had a church from the beginning and will always have a church until the end of the age.

world.⁴⁷ This implies the existence of a people from the beginning of the world. But how then should Calvin's emphasis on the beginning of the church in Acts be understood?

For Calvin the church is a "historically developing organism", conceived with Adam and Eve, foetally developing under the patriarchs, and born at the exodus.⁴⁸ In his commentary on Acts 13:47, for example, Calvin can say that God appears to make a beginning (*initium*) with his church from the sons of Abraham.⁴⁹ From this early beginning the church grows and develops towards maturity. However, the church's growth from infancy to maturity is not without setbacks and disruptions; after all, the church that had a certain extraordinary purity in the ark of Noah, degenerated even in the posterity of the holy Shem (*Posteritas etiam sancti Sem una cum aliis degeneravit*).⁵⁰

Thus, in the church's development Calvin sees several rebirths.⁵¹ God has made several new beginnings throughout the history of Old and New Testament.⁵² For this ecclesiological perspective, Calvin's view on the unity of Old and New Testament is determinative.⁵³ The reformer asserts that the old and the new covenants do not differ, but that they are completely one and the same.⁵⁴ He does accept the differences that Scripture mentions, but these should not detract in any way from the unity that has already been established.⁵⁵ When he discusses the differences – more as an appendix (*appendix*) than as the main argument⁵⁶ – Calvin describes the Old Testament as the childhood of the church and the New Testament as the church's adulthood.⁵⁷ In the progression from childhood to adulthood there is more than one

⁴⁷ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,5,10; in his commentary on Acts 21:21, COR XII/2,205,24, Calvin calls the church of the Old Testament the 'old church' (*vetus Ecclesia*).

⁴⁸ B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 7-9.

⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 13:47, COR XII/1,403,27-28.

⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 14:16, COR XII/2,15,12-14.

⁵¹ B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 46ff, speaks of the origin of the church as a *creatio ex nihilo*, and he calls the continuation of the church in recurring resurrections from death as a *creatio continua*, a creation which extends to providence: "The church is not so much an institution in history in which the restoration of order has been accomplished, as it is itself the history of that restoration."

⁵² For similar thoughts on this issue, see also F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 96-100; P.J. Wilcox, *Restoration, Reformation and the Progress of the Kingdom of Christ: Evangelisation in the Thought and Practice of John Calvin, 1555-1564* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1993), 118-123; P.J. Wilcox, "The Progress of the Kingdom of Christ" in Calvin's Exposition of the Prophets', in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*, ed. W.H. Neuser and B.G. Armstrong [Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, Volume XXXVI] (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), 315-322.

⁵³ See F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 51-54.

⁵⁴ Inst. 2.10.2, CO 2,313; see also T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 42-55; D.L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 37-45.

⁵⁵ Inst. 2.11.1, CO 2,329.

⁵⁶ Inst. 2.10.1, CO 2,313.

⁵⁷ See Inst. 2.11.1-2, 5, 11-13; comm. on Acts 21:21, COR XII/2,205,23-25; comm. on Joel 3:18-19, CO 42,598. This theological perspective on the development of history, progressing from lesser to greater, functions as a

time when God makes a new beginning with his church. Calvin speaks of these new beginnings as new births or rebirths.⁵⁸ For him the exodus from Egypt, the return from the Babylonian exile and the first coming of Christ represent the most important beginnings.

The exodus from Egypt is the first of God's new beginnings with his church. In his commentary on Hosea 11:1 Calvin discusses this historical exodus from Egypt. Before the exodus, and during the stay in Egypt, God's church was almost extinguished; Egypt was like a grave without any spark of life. That was exactly what God wanted before he redeemed his church. Israel's coming out of Egypt was, therefore, the nativity (*nativitas*) of the people. The people were marvellously restored, as if from death to life.⁵⁹ This, according to Calvin, is the language Scripture uses when it speaks about the liberation of the people.⁶⁰ Something similar can also be found in Calvin's commentary on Isaiah 43:19: "The redemption from Egypt may be regarded as having been the first birth of the church (*prima ecclesiae nativitas*), because the people were gathered into a body and the church was established..."⁶¹

Calvin continues commenting on the same verse in Isaiah 43 by saying that, after the first birth during the exodus, the liberation from Babylon was a new birth. In his commentary on Daniel 8:1 Calvin explicitly calls the return from the Babylonian exile the second birth of the church (*secunda ecclesiae nativitas*). This second redemption (the exodus is implied as the first) was the beginning of a new life.⁶² Also in the case of this second birth a preceding death is implicated, as can be seen from Calvin's sermons on Ezekiel 37.⁶³

In exactly the same way Calvin can speak of the birth of the church in Acts. In his letter to Frederick II he speaks of his desire to connect the crown prince to the narrative of Acts, which embraces the very beginnings (*prima ... exordia*) of the church right from its actual birth (*natalis*).⁶⁴ However, from the above it is clear that this birth in Acts should not be understood

hermeneutical principal in Calvin's exegesis, especially when it concerns his ecclesiology, see F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 51.

⁵⁸ F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 98.

⁵⁹ Comm. on Acts 7:6, COR XII/1,181,13-14.

⁶⁰ Comm. on Hosea 11:1, CO 42,432; see also comm. on Hosea 2:14, CO 42,241.

⁶¹ Comm. on Isaiah 43:19, CO 37,94.

⁶² Comm. on Daniel 8:1, CO 41,87; see also P.J. Wilcox, *Restoration, Reformation and the Progress of the Kingdom of Christ*, 158ff; E.A. de Boer, *John Calvin on the Visions of Ezekiel. Historical and Hermeneutical Studies in John Calvin's 'Sermons inédits', Especially on Ezek. 36-48* [Kerkhistorische Bijdragen, volume 21] (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2004), 186.

⁶³ E.A. de Boer, *John Calvin on the Visions of Ezekiel*, 183.

⁶⁴ Letter to Frederick II, COR XII/1,LXIX-LXX.

in isolation, but as part of a series of beginnings that is connected to the preceding history of God's liberation of his people:

... in the reformer's view of the church the language of birth and renewal of the church is descriptive, not abstract... The reformer's intent is much less to abstractly locate one particular point in history than to point out the inseparable union between God (Christ) and his church from beginning to end.⁶⁵

3.2.2. The beginning of a process

When viewing the beginning of the church in Acts as part of a series of beginnings which marks the history of God's liberation of his people, it is important to take note that, for Calvin, these beginnings are not merely momentary events, but rather the initiation of different processes. This can be seen when his comments, as referred to above, are looked at closer.

When speaking in his commentary on Isaiah 43:19 about the exodus from Egypt as the first birth, Calvin stresses that this liberation is not limited to the time when the people went out of Egypt, but that it is continued (*continuator*) down to the possession of the land of Canaan, until the time when the kings had been driven out.⁶⁶ Calvin applies the same principle to the return from the Babylonian exile. The restoration (*instauratio*) from the exile must not be limited to the departure from Babylon, but must be extended (*extendenda*) to Christ.⁶⁷ Whenever the prophets spoke about the deliverance from exile, they extended their thoughts and their prophecies as far as the coming of Christ.⁶⁸

In a very unique way Calvin also applies this principle to the new beginning of the church that started with the ascension of Jesus Christ, as described in the book of Acts. Again the, by now well known, letter to Frederick II is helpful. Calvin wants to connect Frederick to the narrative of the church in Acts, which embraces not only its very beginnings, but also its advances (*progressus*) and increases (*incrementa*).⁶⁹ And in the *Argumentum* Calvin states that the Acts of the Apostles review both the origin and progress (*origo et progressus*) of the church, from the ascension of Christ.⁷⁰ For Calvin the beginning of the church since Christ's ascension is a work of continued progress and growth.

⁶⁵ F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 98.

⁶⁶ Comm. on Isaiah 43:19, CO 37,94-95.

⁶⁷ Comm. on Isaiah 43:19, CO 37,95.

⁶⁸ Comm. on Daniel 8:1, CO 41,87.

⁶⁹ Letter to Frederick II, COR XII/1,LXX.

⁷⁰ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,2-3.

In the cases of the exodus from Egypt and the return from the Babylonian exile Calvin provides clear end-dates for the process of the new beginning – the possession of the land in the case of the exodus, and the coming of Christ in the case of the exile. Does he provide something similar in the case of the newborn church in Acts?

As has already been shown, the beginning of the church in Acts for Calvin coincided with the ascension of Christ, the outpouring of the Spirit and the proclamation of the Gospel by the apostles. Therefore, he primarily extends the new beginning in Acts to the whole of the apostolic era with the accompanying promulgation of the Gospel.⁷¹ When talking about the beginning of the reign of Christ in his commentary on Daniel 7:8, Calvin immediately defines this as the preaching of the Gospel, which was commenced under Caligula, Claudius, Nero and their successors.⁷² The apostles had the task of setting up the kingdom everywhere, through the spreading of the Gospel.⁷³

However, when commenting on the great day of the Lord (*dies magnus Domini*) in Acts 2:19, Calvin disagrees with the opinion that wants to limit this day to the first coming of Christ in the flesh, but he also disagrees with those who want to refer it to the last day of resurrection. In the reformer's view this term covers the whole kingdom of Christ (*totum Christi regnum comprehendit*), from the time that the Son of God was manifested in the flesh until the fulfilment of his kingdom. He immediately continues by saying that the great day of the Lord begins at the first preaching of the Gospel and extends to the final resurrection. The prophet, he says, points to the time when these events began, despite the fact that there is a continuous progress in them until the end of the world.⁷⁴ And, furthermore, in his comments on the apostle Peter's words in Acts 3:21 ('the times of restoration', *ad tempora restitutionis*), Calvin says that the restoration is still in process of completion. In this context he says that the kingdom of Christ had just begun, and the perfection of it is deferred until the last day.⁷⁵ Thus, the new beginning of the church in Acts provisionally extends to the end of the apostolic era, but only reaches its full completion on the last day. This is the long-term perspective of what has been started in Acts. In his commentary on Isaiah 54:2 Calvin makes the same point, using similar images but in a slightly different sequence. Here the return from exile is referred to as the birth of the church, the apostolic era as the actual youth, after which adulthood follows until the last

⁷¹ See P.J. Wilcox, *Restoration, Reformation and the Progress of the Kingdom of Christ*, 120.

⁷² Comm. on Daniel 7:8, CO 41,50.

⁷³ Inst. 4.3.4, CO 2,779.

⁷⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:19, COR XII/1,59,15-26.

⁷⁵ Comm. on Acts 3:21, COR XII/1,106,24-28.

coming of Jesus Christ.⁷⁶ It is clear, however, that for Calvin the new beginning in Acts is the beginning of a process, which extends until the second coming of Christ.

Within this drawn-out process Calvin can also position the church of his own days. Therefore, in the letter to Frederick II he can speak about the actual birth of the church in Acts, and in the same sentence speak about the reborn church in Denmark, in which Frederick plays a leading role.⁷⁷ In this way the beginning church in Denmark gets its place in the work of progress from the apostolic era until its completion on the last day.

3.2.3. The coming of Christ

For Calvin the beginning of the church in Acts forms part of a series of beginnings or rebirths, more specifically a series of beginning processes. This does not mean, however, that the reformer regards all of these beginnings as on the same level. It is clear that the coming of Christ is the definitive aspect that raises the beginning of the church in Acts above any other beginning or rebirth of the church in the history of God's people. In his commentary on Hosea 11:1 Calvin says that "the full nativity of the church (*plena nativitas ecclesiae*) was when Christ came from Egypt to redeem his church."⁷⁸ And he comments on Isaiah 43:19 that he has no doubt that the second redemption (referring to the coming of the Messiah) far surpasses the first redemption (referring to the return from exile, with all the difficulties accompanying it).⁷⁹ For Calvin the coming of Christ marks the beginning of a Golden Age for the church.⁸⁰ However, it is possible to be even more precise. For although Calvin states that the full nativity of the church was when Christ came from Egypt to redeem his church (Hos. 11:1), he also indicates that we should trace the origin and the progress of the church to the ascension of Christ, by which he was declared King of heaven and earth.⁸¹ Thus, while seemingly speaking *in general* about Christ's coming and the beginning of the church in his Old Testament commentaries, Calvin focuses the beginning of the church in the commentary on Acts *more specifically* on the ascension of Christ. And to narrow it down ever further in the same commentary, he says that the Christian church began to exist in its proper form (*legitima*

⁷⁶ Comm. on Isaiah 54:2, CO 37,270.

⁷⁷ Letter to Frederick II, COR XII/1,LXIX.

⁷⁸ Comm. on Hosea 11:1, CO 42,433; see F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 98.

⁷⁹ Comm. on Isaiah 43:19, CO 37,95.

⁸⁰ Comm. on the Psalm 87, CO 31,800.

⁸¹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,1-3.

forma)⁸² only when the apostles were endowed with new power and subsequently started preaching.⁸³ Again, while it seems that Calvin, in several Old Testament commentaries, can speak broadly about the beginning of the church in the time of the coming of Christ, he is more specific when he comes closer to the actual event in the commentary on Acts. As much as the beginning of the church has to do with Christ's birth, death and resurrection in general, the ascension of Christ is a step closer to the actual beginning. But the epicentre of the beginning of the church, according to Calvin, lies with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, accompanied by the preaching of the apostles. This is, of course, no contradiction, as Pentecost was also initiated by Christ. Christ and his Spirit do not stand against each other, because the Spirit was sent by Christ in order to implement his governance of his church.⁸⁴ Having now identified the epicentre of the beginning of the church, it will be beneficial to get a clearer picture of Calvin's view on Pentecost. This will also serve the central question of this study.

⁸² It is possible that the term *legitima forma* is used in order to distinguish the true church from the church among the Papists or the Anabaptists, or both.

⁸³ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,29-31.

⁸⁴ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,21-24; compare how Calvin closes his harmony on the Gospels, comm. on Mark 16:20, CO 45,828. See also W. Balke, 'Calvijn en de Pinksterprediking', 32-33.

4. CALVIN ON PENTECOST: ACTS 2

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of Calvin's description of the events of Pentecost in Acts 2, as being one of the crucial passages related to the research question posed at the outset of this study. Thereby an attempt will be made to identify those elements that Calvin deems important in light of the event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Seeing the significance of Calvin's view on Pentecost for this study, his sermons on Acts 2 in his *lectio continua* will also be consulted.¹ The purpose is not to give a full analysis of the different elements, as this will only be done in Parts 3 and 4, but merely to identify and describe what Calvin says about Pentecost within the small scope of Acts 2.² Pentecost is, after all, the critical juncture where the reformer of Geneva locates the actual beginning of the church: "the Christian church began to exist in its proper form only when the apostles were endowed with new power, and preached..."³ Pneumatology and ecclesiology coincide here in a special way.

As stated before, and with the danger of being repetitious, it is important to note that Calvin's Pneumatology and ecclesiology flow from his Christology. Already from the start of his commentary (Acts 1:1) Calvin is conscious of the link, which Luke establishes between the events of Acts and the preceding deeds and words of Jesus Christ during his time on earth. He explains to the readers of his commentary that Luke starts the book of Acts by summarizing the events of the Gospel in order to link these two volumes together.⁴ Calvin fully acknowledges this link between the Gospel and Acts, and this has important implications for the central role that Jesus Christ plays in the book of Acts. For Calvin Jesus Christ is the acting Person in both Luke's first and second books.

¹ Ten sermons on Acts 2 from the hand of Calvin have survived: Acts 2:1-4, 2:1-11, 2:13-17, 2:18-21, 2:22-24, 2:36-38, 2:38, 2:39-40, 2:41-42, 2:43-45. However, the first two are not from his *lectio continua*. W. Balke, 'Calvijn en de Pinksterprediking', in *Verbi Divini Minister*, ed. J. van Oort, A. de Reuver, and M. Verduin (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1983), 28-31, has clearly shown that the sermon on Acts 2:1-4, taken up in the *Corpus Reformatorum* 48,623-635, should probably be dated May 29, 1558. This is based on a remark by Calvin that there are many who, since 20 or 22 years, had not progressed a single step in the knowledge of God – this time indicator most probably refers back to 1536 when the city of Geneva chose for the Reformation. The spelling used in the sermon also compares better to the spelling used in other sermons around the 1560's. Furthermore, the sermon on Acts 2:1-11, taken up in the *Supplementa Calviniana* VII, 100-109, is clearly dated June 2, 1560, when Calvin interrupted his *lectio continua* on Psalm 48 to preach on Pentecost. See also W. Balke and W.H.Th. Moehn, ed., *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles* [Supplementa Calviniana, volume VIII] (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1994), XVI-XVII; W.H.Th. Moehn, ed., *Plusieurs Sermons de Jean Calvin* [Ioannis Calvini opera omnia (COR), series V, vol. VIII] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2011), XIII-LXXXIX.

² Although secondary literature will occasionally be mentioned, most references to secondary literature will be kept for Part 3 and 4, where the different elements will be worked out more systematically.

³ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,28-30.

⁴ Comm. on Acts 1:1, COR XII/1,15,1-3.

Also when commenting on the events of Pentecost itself, Calvin stresses the central role of Jesus Christ. Peter's speech in Acts 2, for instance, is summarized by Calvin in a very concise, Christ-centred way: "The point (*summa*) of the speech is that he deduces that Christ has now been revealed by the gift (*donum*) of the Holy Spirit which they saw."⁵ Thus, the visible gift of the Spirit, as seen on Pentecost, reveals Christ.⁶ In his sermon on Acts 2:13-17 Calvin says that the purpose (*intention*) of Peter's preaching was to bring the people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.⁷ And when Peter, after explaining Joel's prophecy on the outpouring of the Spirit, continues to make Jesus Christ known to his listeners (Acts 2:22ff), Calvin comments that the promise of the Spirit could only be fulfilled by the coming of the Mediator.⁸ In fact, the gift of the Spirit was the outcome (*fructus*) of the resurrection of Christ.⁹ If Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, he could not have been the Author of the gift of the Spirit.¹⁰ Therefore Calvin can call Christ the Giver of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Not that the Spirit is then given for the first time; he has been with the believers from the beginning of the world. Calvin repeatedly emphasises the Spirit's presence throughout all ages¹², but when Christ was established on his princely seat (i.e. after his ascension) the Spirit was given in more abundance than ever before.¹³

A detail point should attract attention: Calvin, on the one hand, states that Christ could not have been the Author of the gift of the Spirit if he was not raised from the dead; on the other hand, however, he also says that the Spirit was only given in abundance once Christ was seated on his princely throne at his ascension. Therefore, what was earned by Christ through his death

⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:14, COR XII/1,54,24-26.

⁶ This is completely in line with Calvin's exegesis of John 14-16, as described by J.S. Kim, *Unio cum Christo: The Work of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Theology* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 292-302.

⁷ Serm. on Acts 2:13-17, COR V,VIII,275,155-157; see also serm. on Acts 2:22-24, COR V,VIII,298,55-56.

⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:22, COR XII/1,62,24-25.

⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:25, COR XII/1,68,12; this confirms, especially through the use of the word *fructus*, Calvin's view on the Christological benefit of the book of Acts, as described in chapter 3 above. S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943), 88, shows that, for Calvin, the gift of the Spirit was not only the outcome of the resurrection, but that the resurrection itself was worked by the power of the Spirit; see the same in W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1957), 137-140.

¹⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:32, COR XII/1,74,31-33.

¹¹ Comm. on Acts 2:36, COR XII/1,78,22; comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,31.

¹² Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,57,9-11; comm. on Acts 2:33, COR XII/1,75,21-23. S. van der Linde, *De leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn*, 89, suggests that this emphasis might have been aimed at Servetus, who said that the fathers of the Old Testament were without the knowledge and gifts of the Spirit. Interestingly, Calvin specifically says that the fathers under the Law were partakers of the same grace as we are, and then continues: "I repeat that all godly men from the foundation of the world were endowed with the same Spirit of understanding, of righteousness, and of sanctification"; see also his commentary on Acts 15:11, COR XII/2,45-46, where he emphasises the unity of the covenant, and mentions Servetus by name.

¹³ Comm. on Acts 2:33, COR XII/1,75,23-24.

and resurrection was only poured out by him after his ascension.¹⁴ For the reformer of Geneva the ascension is the important element in moving from the Gospel to Acts. The ascension of Christ to heaven is, for Calvin, the conclusion of the narrative of the Gospel. Every aspect of our redemption had been wholly and perfectly completed at the moment when Christ ascended to the Father.¹⁵ Afterwards Christ ensures that the completed redemption is worked out in the lives of the believers and in the church as a whole. The *redemptio* is complete; the *applicatio* of the sacrifice continues.¹⁶ This is the specific work of the Holy Spirit. Christ poured out the Holy Spirit in order to make the whole church partaker of his life.¹⁷ Our God, who sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into this world to assure us of our salvation, also sent his Holy Spirit to make us more than ever partakers of his gifts.¹⁸

4.1. An abundance of the Holy Spirit

But, is Calvin's question, if the Holy Spirit had been given to the believers during all ages, what then was so unique about Pentecost? After all, there was no age that did not have its share of the grace of the Spirit – why was the Spirit of Pentecost promised as if it was some novel and unheard of thing?¹⁹ For Calvin the answer lies in the two phrases: “I will pour out” and “on all flesh”, in which he sees a double antithesis (*duplex antithesis*) between the Old and the New Testament. The first phrase signifies great abundance (*uberem plenamque copiam significat*) in contrast to a more sparing distribution under the Law (*sub Lege*), while the second phrase indicates an immense multitude (*‘omnis caro’ significat immensam multitudinem*) against the few that formerly had full participation in the Spirit.²⁰ Joel commends the excellence of the New Testament, because of the greater abundance of the grace of the Spirit as well as the greater number of partakers in it.²¹

¹⁴ On the reasons for delaying the coming of the Spirit for a whole month and a half (*sesquimensem*), see Calvin's commentary on Acts 1:3, COR XII/1,19; comm. on Acts 2:1, COR XII/1,47.

¹⁵ Comm. on Acts 1:2, COR XII/1,17,15-19.

¹⁶ See W. van't Spijker, 'Die Lehre vom Heiligen Geist bei Bucer und Calvin', in *Calvinus Servus Christi. Die Referate des Internationalen Kongresses für Calvinforschung vom 25. Bis 28 August 1986 in Debrecen*, ed. W.H. Neuser (Budapest: Presseabteilung des Raday-Kollegiums, 1988), 80.

¹⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:32, COR XII/1,74,32-33.

¹⁸ Sermon on Acts 2:13-17, COR V,VIII,280,296-299.

¹⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,56,28-29.

²⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,57,2-9; see also comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,57,12-19 and comm. on Acts 2:33, COR XII/1,75,21-28. W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 328-329, identifies the same two aspects.

²¹ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,57,23-25.

4.1.1. *I will pour out – greater abundance*²²

In the first antithesis, “I will pour out”, Calvin sees an indication of the full abundance (*larga affluentia*) of the Spirit, and, subsequently, of the inexhaustible variety of gifts (*multiplex donorum varietas*) that flows from him.²³ In Calvin’s estimation there is no gift (*donum*) more valuable than the grace of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the most excellent gift that God has given to man. If we are robbed of this gift, Jesus Christ is not ours. Without the Spirit there is no salvation, because when God wants to promise in the shortest possible form to give salvation to his people, he says that he will give them his Spirit.²⁴ God proclaims that we cannot be his children, if the Holy Spirit has not been poured out on us. And if we are not his children, we don’t have communion in any way with Jesus Christ.²⁵

But when we do receive the Spirit and have communion with Christ, the Spirit is like a spring (*fons*) from which all other gifts flow.²⁶ With another image Calvin says essentially the same – the Spirit is the key (*clavis*) that opens the door to all the treasures of spiritual blessings and even to the kingdom of God.²⁷ So, for Calvin Pentecost means an abundance of the Holy Spirit and this, in turn, implies an abundance of gifts. But it is important to keep this order.

It is worthwhile to carefully note how Calvin in Acts 2 speaks about the gift of the Spirit and the gifts, which the Spirit himself distributes.

On the one hand he accentuates the reality of the fullness of the Spirit since Pentecost. The Spirit is a gift to the church – to the whole church, but only to the church. God does not make his Spirit a common thing in which the unbelievers may share, but the church may be certain that the Spirit has been given especially to her.²⁸ God offers his Spirit to us daily, without exception²⁹, and through the visible appearance of the Spirit at Pentecost we may be assured that the church will never be without the invisible and hidden grace of the Spirit.³⁰ The universal church (*universa Ecclesia*) will, for all ages, profit from the appearance of the cloven

²² Subsequently it will become clear that the abundance does not refer primarily to the Spirit of adoption, but to the Spirit of gifts.

²³ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,56,5-6 & 13-14.

²⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,56,17-18.

²⁵ Serm. on Acts 2:13-17, COR V,VIII,281,323-326.

²⁶ Interestingly, shortly afterwards Calvin says that the proper use of the gifts is that they should lead us back to Christ, as to the source (*ad fontem*), comm. on Acts 2:22, COR XII/1,62,26-27.

²⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,56,18-22.

²⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:18, COR XII/1,59,4 & 13-14.

²⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,58,31-32.

³⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,49,17-20.

and fiery tongues³¹, and Calvin assures his readers that this is certainly the case in his own days.³² When discussing the sacrament of baptism, Calvin says that the church may always expect to receive the Spirit, for the Spirit will always be joined to baptism, unless a hindrance arises from our side.³³ It is clear from the above that Calvin wants to assure the readers of his commentary that Pentecost is not an isolated happening, only intended for the believers of that time. He makes every effort to draw the lines of continuity from Pentecost to his own day.

On the other hand, however, Calvin seems to have some reservations. The Jews of Peter's day are invited to share in the same grace as the apostles, but for us today (*nobis hodie*) the visible gifts of the Spirit have ceased (*cessarunt illae visibiles Spiritus gratiae*).³⁴ And also, when commenting on the promise of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38, Calvin says that this passage should not be understood as referring to the grace of sanctification which is conferred upon all the believers in common. Rather, to the Jews in particular is promised the gift of the Spirit of which they saw an example (*specimen*) in the diversity of the tongues. Therefore this does not strictly apply to us (*ideo hoc proprie ad nos non spectat*). In its context Calvin applies this passage to the inauguration (*exordium*) of the kingdom of Christ, set forth by miracles, which lasted only for a time (*non nisi ad tempus extiterunt*). We, however, do not receive the Spirit in order to speak in tongues, be prophets, cure the sick, or work miracles.³⁵ It is clear that Calvin restricts the visible gifts of the Spirit, as was seen on Pentecost, to that initial phase of the church.

Of course, Calvin would not deny that this passage applies to the believers of his own time, but he gives his application a different direction: the Spirit is given to the believers so that they may believe with the heart unto righteousness, that their tongues may be formed to true confession, that they may pass from death to life, that they may become rich and may triumph over Satan and the world. This, according to Calvin, is an even better use of the Spirit than what the apostles had.³⁶ In this way Calvin, when applying this passage to his own day, appears to refer it to 'the grace of sanctification' (*sanctificationis gratia*), exactly what he initially exhorted his readers not to do.

³¹ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,47,32-34.

³² Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,48,2-3.

³³ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,84,3-4; in his sermon on Acts 2:18-21, COR V,VIII,285,25-29, Calvin emphasizes that God does not give his Spirit less liberally than in the time of the apostles, but we resist him and don't allow him to do us good; in his sermon on Acts 2:39-40, SC 8,28,8-15, Calvin says that through baptism we are washed by the blood of Jesus Christ and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

³⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,58,25-31.

³⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,25-34.

³⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,84,1-3.

But despite his reservations, Calvin still deems the church of all times to be the real beneficiaries of the visible gifts and signs of Pentecost.³⁷ Although the disciples needed the gifts to be visible in order to stir them up through the bodily senses, it was not so much for their benefit as for ours (*quanquam non tam eorum causa id factum est quam nostra*). The cloven and fiery tongues rather had its meaning for us and the universal church than for them (*in eo nostri potius et universae Ecclesiae habita ratio fuit quam illorum*).³⁸ When commenting on the sign of the tongues, Calvin says that this was done for us (*nostra id causa factum esse dixi*), because thereby we know that the Gospel did not reach us by chance, but by the council of God.³⁹ And after commenting on the sign of fire, Calvin closes the section by stating that the Lord gave the Holy Spirit only once in visible shape (*sub visibili specie*) in order that we may be sure (*ut certo statuamus*) that the church will never be without the invisible and hidden grace of the Spirit.⁴⁰

In summary it can be said that Calvin restricts the specific gifts of the Spirit, as they appeared visibly at Pentecost, to that time only.⁴¹ These gifts are confined to the time of the inauguration of the kingdom of Christ. But even then the fullness of the Spirit (*plenitudo Spiritus*) that was given to each of the apostles did not mean an equal measure of gifts in every one of them. It rather signified the excellence that would enable each one to execute his office.⁴² The same applies in general to all believers: after the Spirit has brought us into the family of God and made us willing to serve God, he also furnishes us with new gifts;⁴³ not everyone, however, receives an equal measure, but that does not hinder us from developing our small talent.⁴⁴ Thus, the fullness of the gift of the Spirit is available to the church and to every believer; however, he distributes the gifts that flow from him according to the needs of the time (e.g. Pentecost) and the needs of every believer. The gifts are always sufficient for every believer to fulfil his or her office, and abundant enough for believers to be able to share it with their neighbours.⁴⁵ “I will pour out” can therefore be applied to the fullness of the Spirit as well as

³⁷ The distinction between gifts and signs will receive attention in chapter 9.

³⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,47,27-34.

³⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,48,32-49,1.

⁴⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,49,17-20.

⁴¹ See also his commentary on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,48,15-16, where he says that the appearance of tongues is restricted to this event only.

⁴² Comm. on Acts 2:3, COR XII/1,50,4-7.

⁴³ Comm. on Acts 2:18, COR XII/1,59,7-8.

⁴⁴ Sermon on Acts 2:18-21, COR V,VIII,288,94-96.

⁴⁵ Sermon on Acts 2:13-17, COR V,VIII,277,206-209.

to the sufficiency of gifts, which he distributes. In both these aspects the church of the New Testament exceeds the church of the Old Testament, according to Calvin.

4.1.2. *Upon all flesh* – greater number of partakers

The second antithesis that Calvin identifies, relates to the words “upon all flesh”. Formerly full participation in the Spirit was granted only to a few, while an infinite multitude now shares in the Spirit.⁴⁶ What Calvin primarily has in mind with the contrast between the few and the multitude, is the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. When discussing the promise to those who are far off (Acts 2:39), Calvin differs from those who apply this promise to the Jews in the diaspora.⁴⁷ Peter, he says, is not speaking of geographical distance, but of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were the first to become part of God’s family through the covenant, while the Gentiles were banished from his kingdom.⁴⁸ And, when commenting on Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2:18, he says, that as long as the church was restricted to the Jews, they received the titles of servants and handmaidens of God.⁴⁹ However, that situation has changed when the dividing wall was broken down (Eph. 2:14). Christ himself broke down this dividing wall with his death and resurrection, and reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to the Father; the church is now gathered from every quarter.⁵⁰ When the Holy Spirit is poured out so abundantly, it has no other purpose than to call the people, who were once ignorant of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, to that knowledge, so that we would all be united to be the people of God and receive him.⁵¹ The words of Acts 2:21 (“whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved”) bring Calvin to the conclusion that no man is excluded from calling upon God; the gate of salvation is open to all. The only thing that hinders us from entering is our own unbelief.⁵²

⁴⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,57,8-9.

⁴⁷ According to H. Feld, ed., *Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum* COR XII/1 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2001), 85, this is a reference to the opinion of Heinrich Bullinger.

⁴⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:39, COR XII/1,85,5-9; see also Calvin’s commentary on Hebrews 6:17, COR II/XIX,102, where he refers to Acts 2:39 (the text of CO reads 2:29, but it is clearly a reference to 2:39) to show that the Jews are the first heirs, as well as his sermon on Galatians 1:22-2:2, CO 50,354, where he also refers to Acts 2:39 to show that the promises belonged to the Jews.

⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:18, COR XII/1,59,10-11.

⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:18, COR XII/1,59,12-13; comm. on Acts 2:39, COR XII/1,84,17-19 & 85,12-13; serm. on Acts 2:13-17, COR V,VIII,278,216-224; in the sermons on Acts 2:36-38, SC 8,9,21-24 and on Acts 2:39-40, SC 8,31,20-24, Calvin also refers to the breaking down of the dividing wall.

⁵¹ Serm. on Acts 2:13-17, COR V,VIII,276,190-191 & 277,192-195.

⁵² Comm. on Acts 2:21, COR XII/1,61,32-34.

The gathering of the church from every quarter makes the coming of the Spirit on the specific day of Pentecost as well as the accompanying sign of the tongues so important in Calvin's estimation. Against Augustine's subtle interpretation (*argutia quasi necessaria*) about why the Spirit was sent on that particular day⁵³, Calvin prefers a sounder interpretation (*sensus ... solidum*). On a festive day a large crowd used to gather in Jerusalem, and the outpouring of the Spirit would, therefore, be witnessed by more people. In this way the message could be spread abroad, even to the ends of the earth.⁵⁴ In the choice of day God indicates the importance of this miracle – firstly, more people would talk about it in Jerusalem itself, and secondly, it would be spread abroad to the remotest lands.⁵⁵

In the same vein Calvin also highlights the importance of the sign of the tongues. Diversity of languages would have been an obstacle to the spreading of the Gospel; therefore God gave the apostles distinctive tongues, so that they could spread to all peoples what God had entrusted to them.⁵⁶ The diversity of tongues, originally a punishment for human pride, as related in Genesis 11, is turned into a means of blessing, so that lost and wandering men may be recalled to the blessings of unity.⁵⁷ God gave his apostles diversity of tongues in order that no nation should be without the doctrine committed to the apostles; hereby, Calvin concludes, the calling of the Gentiles is confirmed.⁵⁸ Thus, "upon all flesh" is an indication of the spreading of the Gospel to all nations, and of this the book of Acts gives a lively picture.

4.1.3. The apostles and their preaching

As has already been noted, the church began to exist (*extare coepit*) in its proper form only when the apostles were endowed with new power, and preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ – thus writes Calvin in the *Argumentum* to his commentary.⁵⁹ The gifts of Pentecost were, therefore, first and foremost aimed at equipping the apostles to preach the Gospel, to call to the Lord those who were near as well as those who were far. Although Calvin emphasizes that the primary beneficiaries of the *visibility* of the gifts are we, he also makes clear that the gifts themselves were primarily for the preparation of the apostles. God was able to have furnished

⁵³ Augustine reasoned that, as the law was given to the people of Israel fifty days after Passover, so the Spirit, who writes the law in our hearts, is given fifty days after the resurrection of Christ, the true Passover; see H. Feld, ed., *In Acta Apostolorum* COR XII/1, 47 (footnote 5).

⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:1, COR XII/1,47,14-17.

⁵⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:1, COR XII/1,47,23-25.

⁵⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,48,20-24; see also serm. on Acts 2:13-17, COR V, VIII,278,230-240.

⁵⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,48,25-28.

⁵⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,49,2-3.

⁵⁹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,29-30.

the apostles with the ability (*facultas*) necessary for preaching the Gospel without the addition of any sign.⁶⁰ In saying this, Calvin implies that it is not about the sign, but about the thing signified (*Deus signum elegit, quod rei signatae congrueret*): in this case the ability to preach the Gospel.⁶¹ The Holy Spirit was not given to the apostles to keep silent when it was important to glorify the works of God, but they had to be steadfast to bring the Word of God and preach the Gospel unceasingly, as our Lord gave them the means thereto.⁶²

The signs of tongues and fire were aimed exactly at this purpose. God furnished the apostles with distinctive tongues, so that they might spread the Gospel to all peoples.⁶³ Through the coming of the Spirit the apostles, who were uneducated men, became educated so that they acquired knowledge of the different languages.⁶⁴ In addition, Calvin says that the sign of the tongues serves to establish the truth of their doctrine (*doctrina*), for when we learn that the Spirit dwelt in their tongues we know that their doctrine was no human invention.⁶⁵

The sign of the fire connects to this – it was a sign of the efficacy that the word of the apostles would carry. If that efficacy was not given to the apostles, their preaching might have sounded to the furthest parts of the world, but they would only have beaten the air ineffectually. If the Lord had not assured them of the power accompanying their preaching, the apostles would not have dared to start such a difficult task. Through this power, however, the apostles' preaching did not just sound in the air, but it pierced the minds of men and filled them with the warmth that came from heaven.⁶⁶ It kindled the hearts of men, burning up and consuming the vanity of the world, and purging and renewing (*renovet*) all things.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Comm. Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,47,34-35.

⁶¹ See for this important expression of Calvin: comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,48,18; comm. on Acts 2:3, COR XII/1,50, 1-4; comm. on Acts 2:22, COR XII/1,63,21-23. See also Calvin's commentary on John 1:32, COR II,XI/1,50,7-16, where he asks the question why the Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove, for there is always a correlation between the sign and the reality (*tenenda semper est signorum analogia cum veritate*). At this point Calvin refers to Acts 2:3 to show that, when the Spirit was given to the apostles, it was in the form of tongues of fire, because the Gospel had to be spread through all languages and it needed the power of fire. In the context of John 1:32 the Lord wanted to give a public image of the mildness of Christ and therefore he uses the image of a dove (in his commentary on Acts 2:3, COR XII/1,49,27-28 & 50,1-4, Calvin also refers to John 1:32). Calvin uses this expression in particular when speaking against the Papists about the sacraments, see serm. on Acts 2:39-40, SC 8,29,3-20.

⁶² Serm. on Acts 2:13-17, COR V,VIII,274,104-108.

⁶³ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,48,23-24.

⁶⁴ Serm. on Acts 2:13-17, COR V,VIII,278,230-240.

⁶⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,49,4-5.

⁶⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,49,6-15.

⁶⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,49,9-11.

4.1.4. Restoration

Renewal (*renovatio*) – Calvin also uses related terms like *restitutio*, *instauratio*, *reparatio* and *restoratio* – is an important thought in Calvin’s view on Pentecost. He places the renewal of all things, and especially of the church, in the last days. In his commentary on Peter’s speech in Acts 2:17 he admits that Joel does not explicitly mention the last days, but since the prophet does mention the perfect restoration of the church (*plena Ecclesiae restitutio*), Calvin has no doubt that this prophecy refers to the last age. Up until that time the church had been in ruins (*collapsa erat*), but the Jews were fully aware of the promises concerning the blessed and well-ordered state of the church (*promissiones de beato et bene composito Ecclesiae statu*).⁶⁸ Calvin connects the fulfilment of these promises, on the one hand, to the coming of Christ. He says that these promises should not be fulfilled until Christ by his coming should restore (*restitueret*) all things.⁶⁹ The last days will witness the stable condition of the church through the manifestation of Christ. Christ was given for the fulfilment of the promise of restoration (*instauratio*), he was promised as the restorer (*reparator*) of all things.⁷⁰ The restoration (*restitutio*) of all things was to be looked for at the hands of Christ alone.⁷¹ On the other hand, Calvin says that the church could only be restored (*instaurari*) through being renewed (*renovarentur*) by the Spirit of God.⁷² Again the unity of Christology and Pneumatology in Calvin’s theology is apparent.

What is clear, however, is that the coming of Christ, and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit with the accompanying preaching by the apostles, signals the last days, the period of the restoration of the church, which, at that time, was in ruins. Thereby the theme of the beginning of the church, identified in the *Argumentum* to Calvin’s commentary, is deepened and enriched by the concept of renewal and restoration. This connection of beginning and restoration is made explicit for his own time on Sunday, February 2, 1550, when Calvin, at the end of his sermon on Acts 2:43-45, exhorts his listeners: “Let us continue to ask our gracious God to be pleased to restore (*remettre*) things to their original condition and lead us by his Holy Spirit, so that our ingratitude will not cause him to abandon what he has been pleased to begin in us (*commencer en nous*).”⁷³

⁶⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,55,17-30.

⁶⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,55,24-27.

⁷⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:22, COR XII/1,62,23-24 & 63,3-4.

⁷¹ Comm. on Acts 2:25, COR XII/1,70,8-9.

⁷² Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,55,21-22.

⁷³ Serm. on Acts 2:43-45, SC 8,54,8-10.

Thus, the church only begins by being restored. The nature of this concept confirms that the beginning of the church in the time of Acts is not a beginning out of nothing, but rather a rebirth, part of a series of new beginnings. However, Calvin's use of this concept in Acts 2 also confirms that the beginning of the church in Acts is on a different level than previous beginnings. After all, the restoration of all things was to be looked for at the hands of Christ alone (*a solo Christo*). And, the church could only be restored (*non aliter posse instaurari Ecclesiam*) through the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. This is language that does not apply to previous new beginnings. The true restoration of the church and its members has now commenced.

4.2. The believers

The first effect of the renewing work by the Spirit can already be seen in the immediate outcome of Peter's speech, namely the repentance of the hearers whereby they were completely renewed (*totus homo innovetur*)⁷⁴, and whereby God also wants to remake us through his Holy Spirit (*nous reformer par son saint Esprit*).⁷⁵ Through this outcome of Peter's speech we know that the power of the Holy Spirit was not only shown in the diversity of the apostles' tongues, but also in the hearts of those who heard.⁷⁶

Peter's speech had a double effect on the listeners: firstly, that they were touched with a feeling of grief, and secondly, that they were obedient to Peter's counsel. Calvin calls this feeling of grief the beginning of repentance (*hoc poenitentiae initium est*).⁷⁷ But he does not stop with the mere beginning of repentance. Repentance itself receives thorough attention. The Genevan reformer has no doubt that, although Luke only touches on the main points and does not give a verbatim report of the speech, Peter preached at length on the force and nature (*de vi et natura*) of repentance.⁷⁸ On the basis of the main points which Luke provides, Calvin divides Peter's speech in four points: the call to repentance, the promise of the remission of sins which

⁷⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,80,7-8; see also lines 15-17 on the same page, where the word *innovator* is used again for the renewing of the mind, as well as COR XII/1,83,14-15 where Calvin uses the word *renovat* for the work of the Spirit.

⁷⁵ Sermon on Acts 2:38, SC 8,27,1.

⁷⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:37, COR XII/1,79,6-10; see also sermon on Acts 2:36-38, SC 8,13,22-27.

⁷⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:37, COR XII/1,79,10-12.

⁷⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,80,17-20; interestingly, while asserting that Peter preached at length on the nature (*natura*) of repentance, and thereby giving himself the opportunity to do the same, Calvin is quick to say a little later that Peter is not discoursing on the whole nature (*natura*) of baptism (comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,82,27-28). This last comment is made in order to explain why other aspects of baptism have not been included by Peter, but only the forgiveness of sins. However, that does not keep Calvin from giving baptism his full attention.

lifted up the listeners, the recall to Jesus Christ and his blood, and finally baptism as the seal on the promise. In these four points Calvin sees the sum total of Christianity (*Christianismi summa*).⁷⁹ And because repentance is continued throughout our life, this message must continually be heard in the church.⁸⁰

According to Calvin the doctrine of repentance had been miserably corrupted under the Papacy (*misere corrupta fuit haec doctrina sub Papatu*). It should be noted that, until this point in his commentary on Acts 2, Calvin has not explicitly mentioned the Papists (or any other adversaries). His difference with the Papists was not so much on the level of the main doctrines, but on the level of the application of doctrine.⁸¹ This is apparent when, in the last part of Acts 2, he often refutes the Papists.

Repentance in the Roman Catholic Church had become the practising of certain external rites⁸², such as abstaining from eating meat on certain days and engaging in a thousand other monkey tricks (*mille aultres telles singeryes*). But for Calvin repentance means that man turns around to God and contemplates him face to face, and this has its seat in the spirit and in the heart.⁸³ Repentance can be experienced when God gives us the grace to bring all our desires into captivity, when all that makes up our human nature is conquered and we are so governed by his Holy Spirit that our lives are completely ruled by his word.⁸⁴ Against the Roman practising of external rites, Calvin would of course not deny the importance of external works. The inward conversion of the heart should always produce fruits in the life of the believer; repentance can, therefore, not rightly be taught without the requirement of works. But it should not be the kind of frivolous (*frivola*) works that the Papists count as valuable, but rather those that testify to blamelessness and holiness (*innocentia et sanctitas*).⁸⁵

Calvin also refutes the Papists on the second and third points of Peter's speech. They have excluded the forgiveness of sins through Christ from the Gospel. They did this by dividing the forgiveness of sins between the death of Christ and our satisfactions. Thereby they rob the

⁷⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,80,30-31; see the same four points in serm. on Acts 2:38, SC 8,18,31-19,3.

⁸⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,81,3-4.

⁸¹ In his commentary on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,82,12-13, Calvin says: *ut in eo quaeratur ipsius doctrinae effectus*, which underlines the point made here. See also the remark in this regard in his sermon on Acts 2:22-24, COR V,VIII,299,86-90 & 300,91-99, where Calvin says that they agree with the Papists on the Person and work of Jesus Christ, but that they differ on the purpose and meaning of his work.

⁸² Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,80,9-11.

⁸³ Serm. on Acts 2:38, SC 8,19,14-17.

⁸⁴ Serm. on Acts 2:38, SC 8,19,30-31 & 20,1.

⁸⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,81,11-14; see also serm. on Acts 2:18-21, COR V,VIII,287,59-65 and serm. on Acts 2:38, SC 8,20,30-35.

believers of the benefit of Christ and of the certainty of faith. This is connected by Calvin to the Papists' view on baptism, the fourth point of Peter's speech, whereby they have restricted forgiveness only to the time of baptism and the life that went before baptism, without extending it to the rest of life up until death.⁸⁶ They say that forgiveness of sins is given to us only once and that, when a child is baptized, he is truly cleansed of all his sins, but afterwards he must offer satisfaction for those he commits.⁸⁷ Calvin, however, is very adamant: "Let us know, that the forgiveness of sins is grounded in Christ alone (*in solo Christo*)."⁸⁸

As was noted at the beginning of this paragraph, the work of the Spirit in the hearts of those who heard the Gospel had a double effect. Calvin, in his commentary on Acts 2:41, comes back to the second effect, namely that the listeners were obedient to Peter's counsel. Faith must begin with this ready and willing desire to obey, and to persevere in this obedience. Calvin thus calls on his readers to be swift to obey, and to hold steadfastly and firmly to the doctrine that they initially embraced.⁸⁹ In his sermon on Acts 2:41-42 Calvin similarly exhorts his audience in Geneva to ask God to produce in us by his Holy Spirit the burning desire to receive his Word, as the Jews do in this passage.⁹⁰

In summary it can be said that Calvin uses the immediate outcome of Peter's speech to give an explanation of several aspects of the *ordo salutis*. In a few pages he explains the broad scope of the renewing work of the Spirit in the lives of the believers – from repentance, forgiveness and baptism to faith, obedience and perseverance. In all of this the reformer maintains that we receive this solely through the work of Jesus Christ. We are cleansed by his blood, and we enter into a new life by the benefit of his death and resurrection (*et mortis ac resurrectionis eius beneficio novam vitam ingredimur*).⁹¹ This benefit comes first and foremost in the Person of the Holy Spirit, who renews the lives of the believers.

⁸⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,81,31-33 & 82,1-7.

⁸⁷ Serm. on Acts 2:38, SC 8,26,3-5.

⁸⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,82,8-9.

⁸⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:41, COR XII/1,86,31-32, 35-36 & 87,2-4; see also serm. on Acts 2:36-38, SC 8,16,1-21, where Calvin connects the desire to obey the Lord's counsel to the Lord's Supper which was due to be celebrated on Wednesday, December 25, 1549.

⁹⁰ Serm. on Acts 2:41-42, SC 8,38,32-34.

⁹¹ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,18-19.

4.3. The church

Though starting with the repentance and faith of the individual believers, Calvin subsequently shows that these believers were joined to the disciples of Christ and engrafted into the same body (*idem corpus insitos*).⁹² After all, the way of obtaining salvation is that we should be admitted into the church, for outside of it there is no hope of forgiveness of sins or eternal life.⁹³ The church, as the body of Christ, who himself is the Head, is the prime workplace of the renewal by the Spirit.

Calvin, however, is very clear about where this church is to be found, and where not. In Peter's time the church was not to be found under the governance of the priests and the scribes; they might have boasted in the title (*titulus*) of the church, but they were merely wearing a mask (*larva*) of it.⁹⁴ In Calvin's own days the church was not to be found under the Papists, as they have boasted the same: "with gaping mouths they confidently thunder out the name of the church."⁹⁵ But just as in the case of the Jewish leaders, it is a meaningless mask (*larva*).⁹⁶ That is the reason why Calvin saw it as his duty to show how the Papists differed from Christianity; after all, it is always the duty of a good pastor to defend his sheep from the danger of wolves.⁹⁷ When Calvin, in the last part of his commentary on Acts 2 (verses 42-47), describes the church in a positive way, restored by Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, he distinguishes between the public state of the church (*de publico Ecclesiae statu*) and the way of life practised by the believers (*fideles vivendi forma*).⁹⁸

First he describes Luke's recording of the things, which constitute the form of the church visible to the public eye.⁹⁹ By means of four marks (*quatuor notae*) a picture is painted of the true and genuine appearance of the church (*vera et genuina Ecclesiae facies*): the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers.¹⁰⁰

⁹² Comm. on Acts 2:41, COR XII/1,87,1; for other places in Acts 2 where Calvin also uses the image of the body and the members (the church) as well as the Head (Christ), see comm. on Acts 2:25, COR XII/1,68,17-18 & 69,34 & 70,3 & 70,27-30; comm. on Acts 2:36, COR XII/1,78,12.

⁹³ Comm. on Acts 2:47, COR XII/1,92,31-34. These words of Calvin are reminiscent of the well known phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*; S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn*, 99-100, argues convincingly that Calvin agrees with this phrase.

⁹⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:40, COR XII/1,86,4-9.

⁹⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,3-5.

⁹⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,18.

⁹⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:40, COR XII/1,86,18-22.

⁹⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:46, COR XII/1,92,5-6.

⁹⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,23-24.

¹⁰⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,24-27; in his sermon on Acts 2:41-42, SC 8,40,13-17, Calvin mentions three marks, namely the proclamation of the Word of God, the Lord's Supper, and our communion together in true love. Shortly afterwards (SC 8,41,8-11) he is even more general: "... the church exists wherever there is true

Apart from the public state of the church Calvin also highlights the way of life of the believers. The signs of piety (*pietatis signum*) were not only shown in public, but the private lives (*privatae vitae*) of the believers exhibited the same.¹⁰¹ Here again Calvin identifies four marks, without explicitly enumerating them: fellowship, simplicity of life, spiritual gladness, and praise of God.¹⁰² He calls on his readers to learn from the manner of life as practised by the believers.

Interestingly, Calvin deducts the first of the four marks of the lives of the believers (fellowship) from the same words, which in verse 42 he explained as the Lord's Supper, *frangentus panis*. In this context, however, Calvin refers these words to the custom of the believers to eat together.¹⁰³ These meals were enjoyed in simplicity of heart, frugally (the second element). Luke's meaning, according to Calvin, is to show that their method of life together was brotherly and sober.¹⁰⁴ Simplicity of heart combined with the breaking of bread implies sincere love (*syncerus amor*).¹⁰⁵ This love can also be seen from the fact that the rich sold their goods to help the poor, which in turn leads Calvin to a broader discussion of the right view on the community of goods.¹⁰⁶ The third and fourth elements, gladness and praise of God, also go together. Knowing God's love towards us and the assurance of his protection, results in the praise of God, even though we may be surrounded by many dangers.¹⁰⁷

4.4. Conclusion

From the above it is clear that, for Calvin, Pentecost is the result of Christ's work on earth, and more specifically the result of his ascension. Calvin's Pneumatology flows from his Christology. Seeing that this point has sufficiently been made and does not directly pertain to the focus of this study, it will not be worked out any further. The rest of this study will focus on Calvin's view of the Holy Spirit and his work as a result of what happened on the day of

perseverance in the teaching of the apostles, wherever there is loving fellowship among the faithful, and wherever the sacraments are administered as stipulated and the Word is preached in its truth" (English Translation in J. Calvin, *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 1-7. Forty-four Sermons Delivered in Geneva Between 25 August 1549 and 11 January 1551*, transl. R.R. McGregor (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 59. Prayer, which is not mentioned in these lists, is mentioned elsewhere in the sermon on this passage.

¹⁰¹ Comm. on Acts 2:46, COR XII/1,91,23-25.

¹⁰² Comm. on Acts 2:46, COR XII/1,92,5-8.

¹⁰³ E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, N° CXCVII] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), 80-82.

¹⁰⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:46, COR XII/1,92,6-8.

¹⁰⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:46, COR XII/1,92,9-10.

¹⁰⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:44, COR XII/1,90,6-8; for Calvin's view on the community of goods, see H.H. van Alten, "'They Had All Things in Common': Calvin's Exposition of the Community of Goods in Some Key Texts in Acts", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXIX, no. 2 (2013): 181-196.

¹⁰⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:46, COR XII/1,92,1-4.

Pentecost. Several aspects have already been identified (see the summary in the next paragraph) and will be worked out in the next chapters.

It is obvious that the abundance of the Holy Spirit and his gifts are a first result of Pentecost that needs to be investigated further. This abundance, for Calvin, signifies something new that had not been seen before. It became apparent from the above discussion that Calvin distinguishes between the Spirit and the gifts that flow from him. Some gifts were restricted to that time only. How does this restriction function in the rest of the commentary? Are there gifts that are given to all believers, while others are restricted to certain persons or times? How does Calvin view the work of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost as described in the book of Acts? The equipping of the apostles and their subsequent work of preaching and teaching, by which the church began to exist in its proper form, is another clear result of Pentecost. When speaking about the apostles, however, church government and the offices in general necessarily come into view. And, furthermore, the apostles' preaching brings related subjects, such as the Word, the Gospel, and doctrine into play. These subjects need to be investigated in the scope of the whole commentary and in relation to the specific work of the Spirit.

Next, the aspect of the spreading of the Gospel to all nations calls for further research. The breaking down of the dividing wall (Eph. 2:14), that separated Jews and Gentiles, has already been mentioned in this regard, but needs to be worked out further as it is one of the key Biblical passages in Calvin's commentary on Acts. The relationship between the synagogue and the church would necessarily be part of such a discussion.

Renewal and restoration, especially of the church and its members, is an important concept in Calvin's view on Pentecost and the subsequent work of the Holy Spirit. It is important to investigate whether Calvin employs this concept in the rest of his commentary, and in what way. How does he apply the different words, used to convey this concept, to the church and the believers respectively, and what is the specific task of the Spirit in the work of restoration and renewal?

Two very important aspects that flow from Calvin's use of the concept of restoration, is his view on the renewal of the church and the believers, also referred to by Calvin as the body and the members. Especially the church needs to be investigated in depth, and it will be interesting to see the contrast that Calvin draws between the true church of Christ and the false church, and what role, if any, the identified *notae ecclesiae* play in this discussion.

Although Calvin only discusses the sacrament of baptism in his commentary on Acts 2, the sacraments in general will also receive attention in a separate chapter. How does Calvin view the work of the Spirit in the use of the sacraments?

The aforementioned aspects, especially on the church and sacraments, cannot be discussed without also involving Calvin's adversaries, especially the Papists. Although the Anabaptists are mentioned, the focus will mainly be on the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰⁸ The latter is never far away from Calvin's view.

For John Calvin Pentecost and the subsequent work of the Holy Spirit seems to have huge importance for the formation and reformation of the church and the believers, more so than in the Old Testament. In parts 3 and 4 this 'more' of Pentecost, as identified in the different aspects above ("I will pour out" and "upon all flesh"), will be investigated further. In this investigation the polemical writings of the 1540's, which are closely linked to his commentary on Acts (see discussion in chapter 1), as well as his sermons on Acts will also be incorporated.

¹⁰⁸ Calvin explicitly refers to the Anabaptists approximately 16 times, while the Papists are mentioned approximately 126 times.

INTERMEZZO
CHRYSOSTOM, ERASMUS AND CAJETAN

5. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

The purpose of this intermezzo is to listen to the voices of John Chrysostom, Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas de Vio Cajetan, who were chosen as comparative material for this study. Instead of introducing them during the systematic part where their voices might get lost in the sound of Calvin's own voice, or after the systematic part where their voices might be perceived to be a mere postlude, it will be beneficial to get a clear impression of their exposition of the book of Acts and their underlying exegetical methods. This will also serve as framework in which to view Calvin's exposition of the book of Acts. In the systematic part these voices will, subsequently, be limited to detail aspects.

5.1. Chrysostom's exegetical method

Calvin's high view of Chrysostom as Biblical expositor, as already mentioned in paragraph 2.2.1, cannot really be seen from the frequency with which Calvin makes explicit use of the Greek father in his *Old Testament* commentaries. Here the reader will only find two solitary references to Chrysostom.¹⁰⁹ This is most probably due to the fact that Calvin's appreciation for Chrysostom focused specifically on his New Testament exegesis; the latter's lack of knowledge of the Hebrew language prevented him from showing the same kind of expertise in the Old Testament.¹¹⁰ The two references to Chrysostom in Calvin's Old Testament commentaries do not compare to the sixty references to Augustine and the more than ninety references to Jerome.¹¹¹ In the *New Testament* commentaries the picture changes. Suddenly Chrysostom is the most frequently cited patristic writer (105 references), closely followed by Augustine (101 references). However, with only three references the commentary on the book of Acts does not share in this abundance.¹¹² On the face of it this last fact seems a somewhat disappointing result, but one should not forget that Calvin often uses an authority without quoting him directly or mentioning him by name.¹¹³ And seeing that Chrysostom's homilies are the only surviving commentary on Acts from the first ten centuries, as well as coming from

¹⁰⁹ J.R. Walchenbach, *John Calvin as Biblical Commentator. An Investigation into Calvin's Use of John Chrysostom as an Exegetical Tutor* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 48-49.

¹¹⁰ *Epistola* 74, COR VI,I,403,104-108.

¹¹¹ J.R. Walchenbach, *John Calvin as Biblical Commentator*, 48.

¹¹² See Acts 8:33, 8:36 and 18:3; this differs from the single reference identified by J.R. Walchenbach, *John Calvin as Biblical Commentator*, 49, but it does not significantly change the picture.

¹¹³ A.N.S. Lane, *John Calvin, Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 1-2.

the mouth of Calvin's favorite church father when it pertains to the interpretation of Scripture, one could expect a richer result than what the numbers suggest.

In addition, several scholars have shown that Calvin's indebtedness to Chrysostom is primarily on the level of exegetical method.¹¹⁴ Calvin's criticism of Melancthon for expounding only those parts of Scripture that he considers relevant *loci* and his opposite criticism of Bucer for his excessive verbosity, leads him to his first important exegetical principle of *perspicua brevis* and *facilitas* (clear brevity and simplicity), as articulated in the preface to his Romans commentary.¹¹⁵ Calvin achieves this in part because of his decision to reserve the discussion of any doctrinal issues for the Institutes.¹¹⁶ Calvin's ideal of *brevis et facilis* can and has been traced back to similar principles in Chrysostom. A very interesting remark by Chrysostom in his homilies on Acts should be clear enough proof of similarity between the Greek father and the reformer of Geneva – after Peter's speech in Acts 2 Chrysostom approvingly calls upon his readers to observe how, throughout this speech, the writer of Acts studies brevity, being free of ambition and display.¹¹⁷

Moreover, in his preface to the planned translation of Chrysostom's homilies, Calvin gives clear indications of appreciation for Chrysostom's exegetical method. He establishes that the interpretation of Scripture is the priority in any homily. And this, according to Calvin, is exactly Chrysostom's chief merit: "he took great pains everywhere not to deviate in the slightest from the genuine plain meaning of Scripture, and not to indulge in any license of twisting the straight-forward sense of the words."¹¹⁸ Chrysostom's exegesis is indeed characterized by verse-by-verse exposition, careful analysis of words and phrases, and logical

¹¹⁴ See e.g. J.R. Walchenbach, *John Calvin as Biblical Commentator*; N.G. Awad, 'The Influence of John Chrysostom's Hermeneutics on John Calvin's Exegetical Approach to Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63 (2010): 414-436; R.C. Gamble, 'Brevitas et facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic', *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 8-9; A.N.S. Lane, 'Calvin as a Commentator on Paul', in *Calvin et l'humanisme. Actes du symposium d'Amiens et Lille III* [Cahiers d'Humanisme et Renaissance, vol. 99] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012), 81-82, 86.

¹¹⁵ *Calvinus Grynaeo*, Ep. 191, CO 10,404; see also J.R. Walchenbach, *John Calvin as Biblical Commentator*, 137-139.

¹¹⁶ CO 1,255-256: "If after this road has, as it were, been paved, I shall publish any interpretations of Scripture, I shall always condense them, because I shall have no need to undertake long doctrinal discussions, and to digress into commonplaces. In this way the godly reader will be spared great annoyance and boredom, provided he approach Scripture armed with a knowledge of the present work, as a necessary tool."

¹¹⁷ *Hom. 7*, PG 60: *Vide illum ubique breviter loquentem, non ambitiosum, non ostentatorem.*

¹¹⁸ *Epistola 74*, COR VI,1,405,142-145: *Chrysostomi autem nostri haec prima laus est quod ubique illi summo studio fuit a germana scripturae sinceritate ne minimum quidem deflectere, ac nullam sibi licentiam sumere in simplici verborum sensu contorquendo*; see also COR VI,1,403,104-106: *... primum tamen in illis locum tenet scripturae interpretatio, in qua Chrysostomum nostrum vetustos omnes scriptores qui hodie exstant antecedere nemo sani iudicii negaverit.*

explanation for his choice of terminology.¹¹⁹ Chrysostom remains true to the plain meaning of the biblical text, without ending up in a literalist approach to the text. The latter is an important qualification, for the plain meaning is not always evident to the reader, and therefore Chrysostom is not afraid to dig deeper into the hidden dimensions of the text. The plain meaning is not a simplistic one at all, but needs thorough scrutiny.

The second exegetical principle highlighted by Calvin in the preface to his commentary on Romans, is that it is the commentator's task to unfold the mind of the biblical writer. This principle is also reflected in Chrysostom's exegetical work. According to Margaret Mitchell, in her study of Chrysostom's portraiture of the apostle Paul, the Greek father believes that the apostle's letters sketch the image of their writer's soul.¹²⁰ Chrysostom's goal is to bring Paul into contact with the listeners of his own day. He does this by studying the content of the text as a contextual message to the church of a specific time, before applying the conclusions of his study to the church of his own time.¹²¹

Moving from more general principles to Chrysostom's exposition of the book of Acts, one has to take note of Chrysostom's view of history as is evident from his homilies on Acts. Chrysostom considers the book of Acts to be a kind of history, and Luke to be a historian.¹²² In Luke's writing he sees evidence of historiographical methods that were considered standard in Greek historiography. Luke, for example, made use of eyewitnesses to write about the life and work of Jesus Christ in his Gospel, and he was himself an eyewitness for a majority of the book of Acts; his sources, therefore, guarantee the authenticity of the history he has written. Chrysostom also praises Luke for his truthfulness, not hiding facts that might be less flattering¹²³, as well as for his conciseness in not exhausting the reader with unnecessary facts.¹²⁴ In all these things Chrysostom sees God at work in achieving his goals in the events narrated.¹²⁵

Very striking is the two-part format of Chrysostom's homilies. In the first part he twice works through the selected passage, highlighting difficult or important aspects. The second part

¹¹⁹ N.G. Awad, 'The Influence of John Chrysostom's Hermeneutics', 417.

¹²⁰ M.M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 381.

¹²¹ N.G. Awad, 'The Influence of John Chrysostom's Hermeneutics', 419.

¹²² *Hom.* 1, PG 60,163.

¹²³ *Hom.* 51, PG 60,351.

¹²⁴ *Hom.* 28, PG 60,211.

¹²⁵ A.B. Wylie, 'The Exegesis of History in John Chrysostom's *Homilies on Acts*', in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, ed. M.S. Burrows and P. Rorem (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 60-64.

consists of an exhortation where he deals with issues of moral or practical application. The transition from the first to the second part often comes across as very abrupt to the modern reader, and the topic discussed in the second part sometimes seems to have no direct relation to the discussion of the text in the first part. However, it is quite possible that Chrysostom uses this structure to serve his hermeneutic of history. For him history's main function is to teach and to shape the soul. Acts in particular provides moral models from the early church for later generations. The apostles and other early Christians are depicted as models to be followed and imitated. "Let us imitate these, let us emulate them", Chrysostom exhorts his listeners in his homily on Acts 12, speaking about the members of the church praying for Peter's release.¹²⁶ Chrysostom, in his own understanding, is painting royal portraits of the early Christians, using the colors of virtue, so that these paintings might inspire others to imitate them. The pencil is his tongue; the Artist is the Holy Spirit.¹²⁷ By imitating these early Christians and living as they did, Chrysostom encourages his listeners to make royal portraits of themselves too.¹²⁸ Thus is formed a family portrait, depicting a royal lineage, with the earliest Christians being ancestors who are organically linked to the saints of later generations.¹²⁹

5.2. Chrysostom on Acts

Chrysostom held the book of Acts in high esteem, although in his opening sermon he complained that there were many people during that time who did not know this book and its author.¹³⁰ Nonetheless, he considered the Acts to be of equal importance to the Gospels. "Indeed it may profit us no less than even the Gospels; so replete is it with Christian wisdom and doctrine, especially in what is said concerning the Holy Spirit."¹³¹

Who is the Spirit for Chrysostom? He considers the Spirit to be of equal dignity and importance with the Father and the Son, and he does not let a chance go by to stress this point. Great is the authority of the Spirit. What God does, the Spirit indeed also does.¹³² When preaching about

¹²⁶ *Hom.* 26, PG 60,202.

¹²⁷ *Hom.* 30, PG 60,227.

¹²⁸ *Hom.* 40, PG 60,288.

¹²⁹ A.B. Wylie, 'The Exegesis of History in John Chrysostom's *Homilies on Acts*', 64-72.

¹³⁰ *Hom.* 1, PG 60,13; a similar complaint can be found in another sermon on Acts preached at Antioch in 387 AD and not part of the 55 homilies, as well as in Chrysostom's homilies on the Epistle to the Romans, where he seems hurt by the fact that people do not know Paul as they ought to know him, and that there are even some who do not know the number of Paul's epistles.

¹³¹ *Hom.* 1, PG 60,13-14: *Non minus enim nobis, quam ipsa Evangelia utilis esse poterit: tanta nimirum plenus est philosophia, tanta dogmatum sinceritate, miraculorumque copia, eorum maxime, quae a Spiritu sancto patrata sunt.*

¹³² *Hom.* 22, PG 60,173.

the promise of the coming Spirit in homily 1, Chrysostom says that if the Spirit had been inferior to the Son, the consolation of the Spirit's coming would not have been adequate. Therefore, the greater matters of teaching were reserved for the Spirit, so that the disciples might not imagine him to be inferior.¹³³ In the same vein he says that Christ spoke with them much concerning the Spirit so that they should not imagine the Spirit to be an impersonal Energy or Operation.¹³⁴ And when elaborating on Christ's words that the disciples will receive power when the Spirit comes upon them, Chrysostom emphasizes that it does not say that the Spirit is sent, but that he will come upon them, whereby he shows the coequal majesty (*parum honor*) of the Spirit. He immediately continues by questioning the audacity of the opponent of the Spirit for calling the Spirit a creature (*Quomodo ergo, Spiritus sancti inimice, audes illum dicere creaturam?*), without explicitly naming the opponent.¹³⁵ Unlike the prophets of the Old Testament, where the one received a book to eat (Ezekiel) and another's tongue was touched by God (Isaiah), the apostles at Pentecost personally receive the Spirit himself. From this Chrysostom concludes that the Spirit is equal in honor with the Father and the Son (*hic vero ipse Spiritus sanctus est: sicque par est honore Patri et Filio*).¹³⁶ In this and other ways Chrysostom prepares his listeners for what is about to happen at Pentecost. The other Comforter, who is about to come, is no less than the departing Christ.

Chrysostom distinguishes between the Gospels as a history of what Christ did and said, and the Acts as a history of what 'the other Comforter' (*alius Paracletus*, i.e. the Holy Spirit) did and said, although he does not deny the Spirit's work in the Gospels or Christ's work in the book of Acts.¹³⁷ Although there are differing emphases on the work of Christ and the Spirit in the Gospels and Acts respectively, Christ and his Spirit cannot be separated. For Chrysostom, just as it is the case with Calvin, it is never only about the Spirit, but the work of the Spirit and that of Christ are intimately connected. It is, after all, through the plentiful measure of the grace of the Spirit that the disciples can confirm Christ's resurrection from the dead, a doctrine so central to Chrysostom that he can say: "For this, in fact, is just what this book is: a demonstration of the resurrection; once this is believed, the rest would come in due course.

¹³³ *Hom.* 1, PG 60,20; see also *Hom.* 24, PG 60,185, as well as *Hom.* 33, PG 60,240 where, in both instances, Chrysostom draws his readers' attention to the fact that it belongs to the Spirit to enact laws.

¹³⁴ *Hom.* 1, PG 60,21.

¹³⁵ *Hom.* 2, PG 60,30.

¹³⁶ *Hom.* 4, PG 60,44; see also *Hom.* 17, PG 60,137.

¹³⁷ *Hom.* 1, PG 60,21.

The subject then and entire scope of this book, in the main, is just what I have said.”¹³⁸ The doctrine of the resurrection returns throughout Chrysostom’s homilies on Acts.¹³⁹ In several speeches and miracles in Acts he sees evidence of the doctrine of the resurrection. For example, in Peter’s discourse in Acts 2, Chrysostom sees the confidence with which Peter speaks as a sign of the grace of the Spirit as well as an unquestionable proof of the resurrection.¹⁴⁰ The miracle of the healing of the lame man in Acts 3, according to Chrysostom, manifests the resurrection, for it was an image of the resurrection.¹⁴¹ And, says the Greek father, in calling Christ the ‘Prince of life’ in Acts 3, Peter establishes the doctrine of the resurrection.¹⁴²

Thus, on the one hand Chrysostom considers Acts to be the history of what the Spirit said and did, on the other hand he deems the doctrine of the resurrection (i.e. the work of Christ) to be the entire scope of this book. This should not be seen as ambiguity from the side of the Greek father; instead, taken together it leads the reader to the means by which the Spirit speaks and works. The intimate connection between the Spirit and Christ finds expression in the preaching and teaching of the apostles.

In his homily on Acts 1:12, when commenting on the words “this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spoke before”, Chrysostom says that Peter, like Christ, comforts the people with the prophecies, in order to show that nothing strange has happened here besides what had already been foretold. He also emphasizes that this prophecy was not David’s, but the Holy Spirit’s. Then he continues: “See what kind of doctrine the writer has at the very outset of the book”, without specifying exactly which doctrine he has in mind, before saying: “Do you see, that it was not for nothing that I said in the beginning of this work, that this book is the polity (in Greek: *politeia*) of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴³ Doctrine, as preaching by the apostles, makes the book of Acts the domain of the Spirit.

How close Spirit and Word are related can also be seen when Chrysostom asks the question what Pentecost exactly is. Pentecost, he answers, is the time when the sickle was to be put to the harvest and the ingathering was made. For Chrysostom this agricultural act, which denotes

¹³⁸ *Hom. 1*, PG 60,16: *Hic quippe liber in primis est resurrectionis demonstratio, qua credita, caetera facile succedunt. Argumentum ergo et scopus hujus libri, ut summatim dicam, hic potissimum est.*

¹³⁹ Besides the examples mentioned hereafter, see also *Hom. 1*, PG 60,18; *Hom. 6*, PG 60,58; *Hom. 9*, PG 60,57; *Hom. 9*, PG 60,80.

¹⁴⁰ *Hom. 4*, PG 60,46.

¹⁴¹ *Hom. 8*, PG 60,70

¹⁴² *Hom. 9*, PG 60,76.

¹⁴³ *Hom. 3*, PG 60,34-35: *Vide statim in exordia libri, qua utatur doctrina. Cernis vero me non sine causa in principio operis dixisse, hunc librum esse Spiritus sancti institutum.*

the ingathering of the first fruits, is the type, while the reality refers to the time when the sickle of the Word was to be put to the harvest of this world. Interestingly, he then immediately adds that, just like the sickle came down during the time of Pentecost, so in Acts 2 the Spirit came down. First the sickle is the Word, only to be replaced immediately afterwards by the Spirit. This is no contradiction or dilemma, as Spirit and Word go together.¹⁴⁴ Scripture is, to Chrysostom, a well that has no bottom (*fons est immensus*); it is not possible to exhaust the mind of Scripture.¹⁴⁵ The Gospel is the trumpet from heaven that cannot be shut up.¹⁴⁶ And doctrine is the spiritual food with which the apostles fed the people.¹⁴⁷ Seeing that in Constantinople so many prophets, apostles and evangelists were discoursing with the people twice a week – also through Chrysostom’s own preaching – they ought to have been leading the life of wisdom.¹⁴⁸ The rain of doctrine was pouring down on them shower after shower, but still the crops have remained the same size and the plants have not grown any higher.¹⁴⁹ The disappointment sounding in these words is reminiscent of Calvin’s own disappointment when he says that, whereas a great multitude was converted to Christ through one sermon (referring to Peter’s preaching at Pentecost), a hundred sermons can barely move us.¹⁵⁰ It is, however, not only doctrine that provides the spiritual food. The sacraments provide the same spiritual food.¹⁵¹ In his homilies on Acts Chrysostom rarely speaks about the Eucharist, but all the more about baptism. Already in his first sermon Chrysostom makes the relationship between the Spirit and baptism explicit when he says that the Spirit is the essential part of baptism, because the water only has effect through the Spirit.¹⁵² And when Peter is questioned for baptizing the Gentiles, Chrysostom appreciates Peter’s strong argument: if they had the Spirit given to them, how could one refuse to give them baptism?¹⁵³ In our case water and Spirit take place under one and the same act, but for the disciples their baptism with water and their baptism with the Spirit were at different moments. They were first baptized by John, and only later did they receive the Spirit.¹⁵⁴ Chrysostom considers the baptism of John to be incomplete.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁴ *Hom.* 4, PG 60,41.

¹⁴⁵ *Hom.* 19, PG 60,156.

¹⁴⁶ *Hom.* 25, PG 60,191.

¹⁴⁷ *Hom.* 7, PG 60,65.

¹⁴⁸ *Hom.* 29, PG 60,217-218.

¹⁴⁹ *Hom.* 29, PG 60,219.

¹⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,5-7.

¹⁵¹ *Hom.* 40, PG 60,286.

¹⁵² *Hom.* 1, PG 60,21.

¹⁵³ *Hom.* 24, PG 60,185.

¹⁵⁴ *Hom.* 1, PG 60,21.

¹⁵⁵ *Hom.* 40, PG 60,284.

For Chrysostom the church is a heavenly reality. The early church was, as it were, in heaven, having nothing to do with this world's affairs, and resplendent not with walls nor with numbers, but with the zeal of those who formed the assembly.¹⁵⁶ Twice he calls the church 'angelic'. In homily 3 he calls upon his listeners to observe the angelic condition of the church (*Ecce Ecclesiae dignitatem et angelicum statum*), where there was no distinction between male or female, where none had their mind full of worldly matters or household concerns.¹⁵⁷ And in his sermon on the consequence of Peter's speech on Pentecost he calls the church an angelic commonwealth (*haec angelica respublica erat*) where the root of evil was cut out and where nobody called anything their own.¹⁵⁸ The fellowship in the church was not only in prayers, nor in doctrine alone, but also in social relations.¹⁵⁹

Having seen this heavenly reality, Chrysostom has the desire that the churches of his own time would be the same.¹⁶⁰ There is still reformation that needs to take place. Against the backdrop of an un-evangelized peasantry, Chrysostom calls on every Christian – having his eye particularly on the landlords – to (literally) build a church on their lands, get a teacher and do everything in their power that all may become Christians. There should not be an estate without a church. As the peasants cultivate the lands, the landlords are called to cultivate the peasantry's souls. As the peasants bring to the landlord his fruit, so he should raise them to heaven. Before they go to work, they should be able to first raise their hands in prayer. Such a country will be like the paradise of God: all will be friends, holding the same doctrine.¹⁶¹ But Chrysostom makes it even more tangible for every individual household. Seeing the women, children and maidservants singing hymns and praying to God for Peter, he wants every house to become a church, even at night.¹⁶² And finally he calls upon every one of his listeners individually to reform their personal lives, to repent from very concrete sins. He denies entrance to the church to those who are not willing to repent. "If any man refuses to conform to this order, that man I, by my word, as with a trumpet's blast, do prohibit to set foot over the church's threshold, be he prince, be he even the crowned head... I cannot bear to ascend this

¹⁵⁶ *Hom.* 3, PG 60,36-37; see also *hom.* 6, PG 60,58, where Chrysostom says that the spiritual kingdom is in heaven.

¹⁵⁷ *Hom.* 3, PG 60,34.

¹⁵⁸ *Hom.* 7, PG 60,66.

¹⁵⁹ *Hom.* 7, PG 60,64.

¹⁶⁰ *Hom.* 3, PG 60,34.

¹⁶¹ *Hom.* 18, PG 60,147-148.

¹⁶² *Hom.* 26, PG 60,203.

throne without effecting some great reformation.”¹⁶³ Here a form of church discipline becomes apparent, one for which Chrysostom is willing to take personal responsibility.

How serious Chrysostom took his office as bishop can be seen from a passage in homily 3, where he says, *inter alia*:

Did you but know that a bishop is bound to belong to all, to bear the burden of all; that others, if they are angry, are pardoned, but he never; that others, if they sin, have excuses made for them, he has none; you would not be eager for the dignity, would not run after it. So it is, the bishop is exposed to the tongues of all, to the criticism of all, whether they be wise or fools. He is harassed with cares every day, nay, every night... The soul of a bishop is for all the world like a vessel in a storm: lashed from every side, by friends, by foes, by one's own people, by strangers. Does not the emperor rule the whole world, the bishop a single city? Yet a bishop's anxieties are as much beyond those of the emperor as the waters of a river simply moved by the wind are surpassed in agitation by the swelling and raging sea.¹⁶⁴

But despite the hardships of being a bishop, the church still needs them. The angelic community needs these angels of light, ministers of things above (*hinc palam est eos fuisse angelos lucis, et supernarum rerum ministros*).¹⁶⁵ It is clear that in Chrysostom's experience he and other ministers were despised and rejected, but as long as he was bishop he would not give up his responsibility, not for his own sake but for the salvation of the believers.¹⁶⁶ It is, after all, the task of the bishop to govern and superintend the church.¹⁶⁷ He is a teacher that needs to teach not what the disciple chooses, but what is expedient for the latter to learn.¹⁶⁸ Like the apostles he is entrusted with a deposit, which is like a debt that needs to be paid off.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Hom. 8, PG 60,74: *Si quis noluerit hoc praeceptum perficere, hunc verbo quasi tuba prohibeo, ne limina ecclesiastica pertranseat, sive princeps sit, sive ille ipse qui diademate cingitur... In hunc thronum ascendere non audeo, nisi quid magni praestitero*; see also hom. 9, PG 60,84.

¹⁶⁴ Hom. 3, PG 60,39: *Si scires enim episcopum omnium esse, omnium onera ferre oportere; quod aliis irascentibus venia detur, illi vero minime; quod aliis peccantibus excusatio multa, ipsi vero nulla sit: ad hanc dignitatem non accurrisses. Hic enim omnium linguis expositus est, omnium iudicio, sapientium et insipientium: quotidianis curis atteritur, imo et nocturnis... Sacerdotis anima nihil differt a navi fluctibus agitate: undique pungitur, ab amicis, ab inimicis; a suis, ab alienis. Annon orbis est Imperatori subditus; hic vero unam tantum civitatem regit? At tanto majores sunt hujus sollicitudines, quanto majus est pelagus tumens ac furens aqua fluminis.*

¹⁶⁵ Hom. 4, PG 60,45.

¹⁶⁶ Hom. 8, PG 60,73 & 76.

¹⁶⁷ Hom. 3, PG 60,39.

¹⁶⁸ Hom. 2, PG 60,28.

¹⁶⁹ Hom. 11, PG 60,94.

And Chrysostom knows that the mouth by which God speaks, is the mouth of God. Just as our mouth is the mouth of our soul, though the soul has no mouth, so the mouth of the prophets is the mouth of God.¹⁷⁰

Several times Chrysostom highlights the role of Peter within the college of apostles. He calls him “the holy leader of the blessed company, the lover of Christ, the good shepherd, the man put in trust with the keys of heaven, the man who received the spiritual wisdom”.¹⁷¹ Peter is the one who always begins the discourse¹⁷², although this office of speaking was an honor ceded unanimously to him by the other apostles.¹⁷³ But, says Chrysostom, it should be observed how Peter does everything with common consent, nothing imperiously.¹⁷⁴ When a replacement of Judas needs to be chosen, Peter defers the decision to the whole body. He does not choose Joseph and Matthias, but he merely introduces the proposition to that effect, while at the same time pointing out that even this was not his own, but from old time by prophecy. Thus he acts as expositor, not as preceptor.¹⁷⁵

Also Paul receives a special commendation from Chrysostom. When the ship, on which Paul found himself as a prisoner, was about to be shipwrecked, Chrysostom intuitively knows that the skillful pilot of this ship needs the apostle, who was no actual pilot. For Paul did not steer a vessel of this (earthly) kind, but he steered the church of the whole world; Paul steered it, not by the art of man, but by the wisdom of the Spirit.¹⁷⁶ A few sermons on he picks up this image again when he elaborates on Paul, the apostle. He calls Paul’s heart both a sea and a heaven. He is a sea, having for its voyagers not those who sail from city to city, but those who sail from earth to heaven. If any man sails in this sea, he will have a prosperous voyage. On this sea, not winds, but the Holy and Divine Spirit wafts the souls, which sail thereon. Here are no waves, no rocks, and no monsters: all is calm.¹⁷⁷ Such is the esteem Chrysostom has for the apostle who leads people to God.

¹⁷⁰ *Hom.* 19, PG 60,156.

¹⁷¹ *Hom.* 6, PG 60,55-56: *Ideo hic sancti beati chori princeps, amator Christi, ardens discipulus, cui commissae sunt caelorum claves, qui revelationem spiritualem accepit...*; see also *hom.* 3, PG 60,33-34, where Chrysostom calls Peter the one put in trust of the flock by Christ, and having precedence in honor.

¹⁷² *Hom.* 3, PG 60,34; *hom.* 8, PG 60,72.

¹⁷³ *Hom.* 4, PG 60,46.

¹⁷⁴ *Hom.* 3, PG 60,34.

¹⁷⁵ *Hom.* 3, PG 60,36.

¹⁷⁶ *Hom.* 53, PG 60,372.

¹⁷⁷ *Hom.* 55, PG 60,383.

5.3. Conclusion

John Chrysostom's fifty-five homilies truly contain a wealth of exegetical riches on the book of Acts. Chrysostom tries his utmost to unlock the literal sense of the text by systematically going through the text in two rounds of exposition. Most interesting, however, is the way in which he applies his findings to his own time in the last, and often most extensive, part of every homily. In a very existential and personal way he mirrors the church of his own time to the church of the very beginning, and his own office to that of the apostles. And often this leads to a critique of the church and the believers of his time, and a concrete call to repentance and reformation. While getting to know the time of the book of Acts better through Chrysostom's homilies, it can with some right also be said that one also becomes familiar with Chrysostom's own time.

In Chrysostom one can in some cases already detect the seeds of what would later become common Roman doctrine (e.g. his view on baptism and the office), although in Chrysostom there is still very much the primacy of the Word. This is ensured by the fact that he keeps the Spirit and Christ – particularly the resurrection of Christ – close together, and this finds expression in the preaching and teaching of the apostles. One can understand that Chrysostom had such an attraction on Calvin, as these are elements that are very much present in the reformer's own thinking and that will return in his commentary on the book of Acts.

6. DESIDERIUS ERASMUS

Calvin explicitly refers to Erasmus 25 times in his commentary on Acts (see par. 2.2.2). These references almost exclusively pertain to philological issues and matters regarding the translation of the text. It is striking how often Calvin compares Erasmus and the Vulgate and makes an informed choice between the two, or rejects both in favor of his own or someone else's translation. However, translation and philology is not all that Erasmus is good for. There are several interesting exegetical and doctrinal parallels and differences, which necessitate a deeper look at Erasmus' exegetical method and his explication of the book of Acts.

6.1. Erasmus' exegetical method

In several writings Erasmus has elaborated on his exegetical method. His *Encheiridion* (1503), the introductory writings to the *Novum Testamentum*¹, and the *Ecclesiastae* (1535) all give insight into the rules he deemed important for the study and interpretation of Scripture. J.B. Payne, in a thorough article on this topic, points out that the starting point of Erasmus' hermeneutics is the Neo-Platonic conception of the contrast between flesh and spirit.² In Canon V of his *Encheiridion* Erasmus states:

One maintains perfect piety if one seeks always to proceed from the visible things, which are either imperfect or neutral, to the invisible according to the higher aspect of man.³

This basic assumption has a direct bearing on Erasmus' anthropology, where he sees a twofold (or sometimes threefold) division in man (body and soul, or flesh and spirit), as well as on his reading of Scripture, where he identifies the flesh with the letter or literal sense and the spirit with the spiritual or hidden meaning. Likewise, there is a link between his doctrine of Scripture and his doctrine of the incarnation. Christ simultaneously has a human and a divine nature, but

¹ The *Paraclesis* (1516), *Methodus* (1516), and *Ratio verae theologiae* (1518).

² J.B. Payne, 'The Hermeneutics of Erasmus', in *Scrinium Erasmianum*, vol. II, ed. J. Coppens (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), 13-49.

³ J. Clericus, ed., *Desiderii Erasmi Roterdami opera omnia*, Leiden, 1703-1706 (photo-reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), V. Hereafter, when the Leiden edition of Erasmus' works will be cited, it will be referred to as LB with volume number, column number, and letter designating position in column. LB V, 27D: *ut in hoc uno constituas perfectam pietatem, si coneris semper a rebus visibilibus, quae fere vel imperfectae, vel mediae sunt, ad invisibilia proficere, juxta superiorem hominis divisionem.*

just as in Scripture the spiritual meaning is hidden behind the letter, so in Christ his divinity is hidden behind his humanity.⁴

This neo-Platonic point of departure leads Erasmus to read the Scriptures in the first instance in a literal-historical sense, in which knowledge of the languages (Latin, Greek and Hebrew), textual criticism, grammar and rhetoric are important. But in Erasmus' view, the Scriptures ultimately need to be read in a spiritual sense, in which allegory and tropology are important exegetical tools.⁵ Several examples from his *Paraphrases* on Acts underline Erasmus' search for the deeper, spiritual meaning. When Pentecost comes Erasmus draws a parallel between Mount Sinai, where the law was given, and Mount Zion, where the Spirit was received. From Mount Zion, which in Hebrew means 'watch-tower', "all things earthly are looked down upon, all things heavenly are, through faith, observed as though nearby."⁶ Furthermore, in his defense before the Jewish council in Acts 7, Stephen speaks about David's desire to build a house for the Lord, something that was eventually done by Solomon. The Erasmian Stephen then says to the high priest and the Jewish council: "... yet, in truth, this temple is only a figure of the true spiritual temple, the church, which is now built by Jesus of Nazareth, your king, of whom Solomon was the type."⁷ According to Erasmus it is no violation of the physical temple when the spiritual temple is given precedence. It is right, Erasmus says in conclusion, that shadows yield to the truth and it is fitting that the carnal yield to the spiritual.⁸ And, as a final example, in the eunuch's reading of Isaiah 53 Erasmus ascribes to him the awareness that in the nature of prophecy what seemed to be said about this or that person according to the historical sense often referred to another according to the more hidden sense.⁹ Even from these examples it is clear that Erasmus is ultimately searching for the spiritual and hidden sense of the text. Often this is implicit, but sometimes, as in the cases noted above, he states it explicitly.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the church fathers Origen and Jerome, champions of the allegorical method of interpretation in the early church, are Erasmus' favorite patristic sources.¹⁰ Calvin, on the other hand, summarily deposes of Origen and Jerome as of little use

⁴ J.B. Payne, 'The Hermeneutics of Erasmus', 23-24.

⁵ J.B. Payne, 'The Hermeneutics of Erasmus', 26-35; see also R.C. Gamble, '*Brevitas et facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic', *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 4.

⁶ LB VII, 666C-D: *unde despiciuntur omnia terrena, unde per fidem velut e propinquo prospectantur coelestia.*

⁷ LB VII, 695E: *Verum, hoc Templum nihil aliud est quam figura veri templi spiritualis, quod est Ecclesia, quae nunc aedificatur per Jesum Nazarenum Regem vestrum, cujus typum gerebat Solomon.*

⁸ LB VII, 696B.

⁹ LB VII, 701C.

¹⁰ J.B. Payne, 'The Hermeneutics of Erasmus', 24-25; see also J.B. Payne, 'Erasmus on Romans 9:6-24', in *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. D.C. Steinmetz (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990), 119-135.

to his exegetical method, because of their excessive use of allegory. In his preface to the planned translation of Chrysostom's homilies Calvin says regarding Origen that he obscures the plain meaning of Scripture with constant allegories. And Jerome's writings on the Old Testament have very little reputation among scholars, for he is almost completely bogged down in allegories, by which he distorts Scripture with too much license.¹¹ Also in other places Calvin rejects the allegorical method of Origen. In his commentary on Galatians 4:22 as well as 2 Corinthians 3:6 he accuses Origen of using Paul's words to turn Scripture away from her true and simple meaning.

This is a difference in exegetical method between Erasmus and Calvin that cannot be ignored, and that can be seen in practice in Erasmus' *Paraphrases* on Acts. When he comments on the building where the disciples resided in expectation of the coming of the Spirit, he describes the *cenaculum*, which was the higher part of a building; the lower parts of a house, he says, were usually occupied either by shops or workplaces. And then the allegory is drawn: "But whoever prepares himself as a dwelling for the Holy Spirit, must be far removed from sordid cares."¹² A little later he explains that where the mind is occupied with low and sordid cares, there the Holy Spirit is not found; it has to be in an upper room.¹³ In another example Erasmus comments on the saying that the apostles were full of new wine. He confirms that they were indeed filled with the new wine, which the Lord did not want entrusted to old skins. The old wine of the Mosaic Law failed at the wedding of the church, and the cold and tasteless sense of the Law was changed into new wine through Christ. "Whatever is carnal is tasteless and weak; whatever is spiritual is lively, effective, and appealing to the taste."¹⁴ One final example will suffice. In his commentary on Acts 9, Erasmus allegorizes Peter's actions in bringing Tabitha back to life. Just as Peter did with Tabitha – praying, exhorting and extending his hand – so the weak must be raised up toward godliness. First, there must be prayers to God that he will have mercy on them. Then they must be addressed with teaching, rebuke and exhortation. Finally, we must with hand extended assist them towards the more perfect things.¹⁵

Honesty, however, demands to acknowledge that there is a gradual change in Erasmus' view of allegory. In the *Encheiridion* (1503) Erasmus puts almost all the emphasis on the spirit

¹¹ W.I.P. Hazlett, 'Calvin's Preface to Chrysostom's Homilies', in *Humanism and Reform: the Church in Europe, England, and Scotland, 1400-1643*, ed. J. Kirk (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 144-145.

¹² LB VII, 663F: *Procul autem a sordidis curis oportet abesse, qui se parat habitaculum divino Spiritui.*

¹³ LB VII, 666E.

¹⁴ LB VII, 668D: *Insipidum ac dilutum est quicquid carnale est: vividum, efficax ac sapidum est, quicquid est spirituale.*

¹⁵ LB VII, 706E.

rather than the letter of Biblical interpretation, based on the Pauline phrase “the letter kills, the spirit makes alive”.¹⁶ But as his preoccupation with and appreciation for philology and history grows, he becomes ever more critical of the free and forced allegorical exegesis of some of the church fathers; his approval of Origen also becomes more qualified and at times even critical.¹⁷ Eventually, in his *Ecclesiastae* (1535) he recommends that, when the doctors of the church explain the same allegory in different ways, our preference should go out to the interpretation which is closest to the *sensus germanus*¹⁸, a clear indication of his appreciation for the literal, historical and grammatical meaning of Scripture.

In his *Ratio verae theologiae* (1518) he warns that allegory should be used with the greatest care in order not to remove all historical sense from Scripture. He gives some important guidelines for the use of allegory¹⁹: firstly, if nothing in the historical sense is offending, then one should refrain from using allegory; for that purpose the literal and historical meaning as well as the grammar of the passage should first be determined. Secondly, if allegory needs to be used, not every aspect of the allegory needs to be drawn out, but only those parts necessary to incite the religious affection, and it should be analogous to the whole of Scripture. The interpreter is also advised to draw on understanding of natural things and on familiarity with allegories, which have been used throughout the ages by poets.

What can be seen from the above is that, through the years from 1503 to 1535, Erasmus develops a more balanced view on the relation between the literal-historical sense and the spiritual-allegorical sense of Scripture. In fact, the former becomes to him the basis on which the latter is built. This balance probably grew from Erasmus’ preoccupation with the Greek text of Scripture and his own exegetical work. And it is mainly here where we see Calvin interacting with Erasmus. Calvin himself left very little space for allegory, but rather resorted to the typological hermeneutic utilized by Chrysostom, and therefore found little space to interact with Erasmus on allegorical interpretation. But in terms of philology and the literal meaning of the text he certainly built on Erasmus. Calvin’s textual and philological dependence on Erasmus is obvious to all who are familiar with Calvin’s use of Erasmus’ Greek and Latin texts, but from what follows it will become apparent that there is also another level

¹⁶ *Encheiridion*, LB V, 9A: *Caro non prodest quidquam, Spiritus est qui vivificat.*

¹⁷ J.B. Payne, ‘The Hermeneutics of Erasmus’, 42-43.

¹⁸ *Ecclesiastae*, LB V, 1048C: *Primum quoties eandem Allegoriam Doctores variis modis interpretantur, eam sumet, quae ad germanum sensum proxime videbitur accedere.* See also J.B. Payne, ‘The Hermeneutics of Erasmus’, 46-47.

¹⁹ D.H. Compier, ‘The Independent Pupil: Calvin’s Transformation of Erasmus’ Theological Hermeneutics’, *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 226; see also J.B. Payne, ‘The Hermeneutics of Erasmus’, 43-44.

of dependence not yet fully unearthed, namely Erasmus' understanding of the book of Acts and its literal-historical meaning.

Finally, a word on Erasmus' *Paraphrases* is in order before his view on the book of Acts is investigated.²⁰ Erasmus published the first edition of his Greek New Testament with a Latin translation as well as annotations in March 1516. It seems that a barrage of criticism from theological circles on these works persuaded him to take up the art of commentating. This is suggested when, around January 1518 in a letter to Johannes de Molendino, he wrote: "I am especially pleased that men who are so well thought of should think well of my paraphrase; I only wish I had always labored in that sort of field. I would rather construct a thousand paraphrases than one critical edition."²¹

How then did Erasmus view the paraphrase genre? Fundamental for his view is that the form is intended to serve the meaning; the meaning is the most important, and the form can be changed in order to improve the meaning. Added to this principle, is the conviction that the meaning of the text can, in fact, be made clearer.²² Erasmus writes to Louis Coronel: "In a translation the sense is rendered literally; in a paraphrase it is legitimate to add something of your own as well that may make the author's meaning clearer."²³ However, this is done in such a way that there is no distinction between the original author and the commentator; the author himself seems to be explaining his own text. Therefore Erasmus can say that it is not he but the original author that speaks.²⁴ Paraphrasing is about clarifying the *sensus* of the text by reformulating it, without changing the meaning; saying things differently without saying different things.²⁵

In this respect a paraphrase differs from a translation, in which one attempts to render the author's words themselves. On the other hand, a paraphrase shares with a commentary the use of the paraphraser's or commentator's own words. But a

²⁰ For more on Erasmus' *Paraphrases* see H.M. Pabel and M. Vessey, ed., *Holy Scripture Speaks. The Production and Reception of Erasmus' Paraphrases on the New Testament* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 2002); J.B. Payne, A. Rabil, W.S. Smith, 'The *Paraphrases* of Erasmus: Origin and Character', in *Paraphrases on Romans and Galatians*, ed. R.D. Sider [Collected Works of Erasmus, vol. 42] (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1984), xi-xix; J.-F. Cottier, 'Erasmus' *Paraphrases*: A 'New Kind of Commentary'?', in *The Unfolding of Words. Commentary in the Age of Erasmus*, ed. J.R. Henderson (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 27-46.

²¹ CWE 5, Ep. 755, lines 4-7.

²² J.B. Payne, A. Rabil, W.S. Smith, 'The *Paraphrases* of Erasmus', xiii-xv.

²³ CWE 9, Ep. 1274, lines 37-9: *In metaphrasi sensus bona fide redditur, in paraphrasi licet etiam de tuo addere quod auctoris sensum explanet.*

²⁴ CWE 10, Ep. 1381, lines 447-8.

²⁵ J.-F. Cottier, 'Erasmus's *Paraphrases*: A 'New Kind of Commentary'?', 32.

paraphrase differs from a commentary in being a continuous narrative rather than an interrupted one.²⁶

These last words show that there is a poetic and rhetorical dimension to paraphrases, whereby it is distinguished from simple commentaries and which would have had a special attraction to the humanist Erasmus.

Despite Erasmus' joy in writing *Paraphrases*, these were not received without criticism either, although much less than his Greek text and Latin translation. However, Erasmus could call upon a number of precedents in order to justify this form of commentary. There was Themistius (317-388), who paraphrased the works of Aristotle, and Juvenius, a fourth century priest, who paraphrased the Gospels in the form of a poem. He also mentions Quintilian, whose method of paraphrasing Erasmus recommends to students. Even Augustine and Jerome have partly followed the way of paraphrasing.²⁷

Ultimately, Erasmus has a pastoral purpose with his *Paraphrases*. He wants to guide his readers towards true Christian piety, and for that purpose he offers the less-educated Christians a simplified version of the text. The *Paraphrases* allow all readers to converse directly with the biblical author.²⁸

6.2. Erasmus on Acts

In the book of Acts Erasmus sees a wonderful picture (*mire depinxit*)²⁹ being painted of the newborn church that serves as model and example for the church of his own day.³⁰ As has already been shown in paragraph 2.2.2, Erasmus deems it important for Christians to become familiar with the infancy of their religion so that they may have clarity on what needs to happen to renew the church from its current state.³¹ The current state of the church is, in Erasmus' estimation, one of turbulence and corruption (*turbulentissimum & corruptissimum*).³² It is a serious illness, where the patient is very ill in both body and spirit, and this illness demands

²⁶ J.B. Payne, A. Rabil, W.S. Smith, 'The *Paraphrases* of Erasmus', xvi.

²⁷ J.B. Payne, A. Rabil, W.S. Smith, 'The *Paraphrases* of Erasmus', xvii-xix.

²⁸ H.M. Pabel, 'Retelling the History of the Early Church: Erasmus' Paraphrase on Acts', *The American Society of Church History* 69:1 (2000): 64.

²⁹ LB VII, 651-652.

³⁰ See H.M. Pabel, 'Retelling the History of the Early Church', 65-66; for more on Erasmus' ecclesiology, see C. Augustijn, 'The Ecclesiology of Erasmus', in *Scrinium Erasmianum*, vol. II, ed. J. Coppens (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), 135-155.

³¹ A. Reeve and M.A. Screech, ed., *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament, Acts – Romans – I and II Corinthians* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 271.

³² LB VII, 651-652.

some outstanding and predestined master of the medical art.³³ For that very reason Erasmus, with a striking piece of wordplay, dedicates Luke the physician (meaning Luke, the author of Acts) to Pope Clement VII, a Medici – in this act of dedication he offers the foundations of the newborn church to the one man through whom he hoped the church in ruins would be reborn.³⁴

The theme of the newborn church returns several times in Erasmus' *Paraphrases* on Acts. In commenting on the expectant gathering of the disciples in the upper room in Acts 1, Erasmus exhorts his readers to consider with him for a little while the first beginnings of the nascent church (*contemplator Ecclesiae nascentis primordia*).³⁵ And when coming to a summary of Acts 2, on the life and doctrine of the first believers, Erasmus, through the voice of Luke, draws Theophilus' attention to the fact that the rise of the church took its beginnings from concord and joy, and that in this felicitous beginnings of the nascent church (*nascentis Ecclesiae*) the priests, Pharisees and scribes, the enemies of the church, are not even mentioned.³⁶ Erasmus saw the formation of the church in Acts as a new beginning, a new birth, and per implication a time of health and vitality. However, there is also another side to this new birth: in the death of Ananias in Acts 5, Erasmus sees a striking example, at the very beginning of the nascent church (*Ecclesiae nascentis*), that no one who imitates Ananias will escape the divine vengeance.³⁷ The new birth needs to be guarded against impurity and hypocrisy.

Related to the new birth of the church are the concepts of renewal and restoration. For the task that the disciples received from Jesus, the baptism of John for the forgiveness of sins was not enough. For a new teaching a new Spirit is needed.³⁸ To be sure, it is the same Spirit as the disciples have received before, but it would now be poured out in greater abundance, in order to renew all things (*renovaturus omnia*).³⁹ In reaction to these words by Jesus, as paraphrased by Erasmus, the disciples ask whether Jesus would, upon sending the Holy Spirit, restore

³³ LB VII, 651-652: *nullus autem periculosior, quam cum aegrotus utraque sui parte laborat, corpore nimirum & animo*. Subsequently Erasmus diagnoses the sickness as, on the one hand, enmity between monarchs and, on the other hand, conflicting convictions. It seems, therefore, that the body and the spirit could be an indication of the unity of the political and the ecclesiastical spheres (the world and the church), and that this relates to the twin deceases of war and doctrinal conflict. For Erasmus the answer to both is peace.

³⁴ LB VII, 653-654.

³⁵ LB VII, 663E.

³⁶ LB VII, 675B.

³⁷ LB VII, 685A.

³⁸ LB VII, 661E.

³⁹ LB VII, 661F.

(*restituturus*) the kingdom to the Israelite people. Erasmus' eventual response to this question is that this kingdom, in ruins everywhere but especially among the Jews, would be restored by Christ through the Gospel (*restituit Christus per Euangelium*), a response that refocuses the disciples on the task at hand, namely the proclamation of the Word.⁴⁰ Erasmus also calls the election of Matthias a restoration (*instaurandam*) of the integrity of the apostolic order.⁴¹ The newborn church of Acts, as well as its institutions, is therefore a renewal and restoration of what before that time was lying in ruins. This restoration is a work of Christ through his Spirit and through the Gospel.

In similar fashion, Erasmus wishes for a restoration of the church in his own time. He, and others, had hoped that when Adrian VI became pope, he might restore (*restituerentur*) the ruined state of thing. However, within a year of Adrian's ordination they received news of his death.⁴² Now Erasmus dedicates his work to Clement VII, through whom he hoped that the church in ruins would be reborn (*renascatur*). As Christ used the achievements of the leaders of his church in the beginning to promote the growth of the kingdom of the church, so too Erasmus hopes that Christ will bless the pious efforts of Clement.⁴³

The conclusion of Erasmus' dedication, where he draws parallels between, on the one hand, the church and its leaders in Acts and, on the other hand, the church and its new leader in his own day, provides a natural entrance into two other important topics: the church and the office bearers.

How does Erasmus view the church? Hilmar Pabel has shown that peace is a fundamental concept in Erasmus' view of the church.⁴⁴ This concept became even stronger after Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X and put under the imperial ban by Emperor Charles V. In Erasmus' view the reformers brought discord, the very opposite of peace, into the church. In a letter to Justus Jonas he points out that the word 'church' is devoid of any meaning if it does not include the notion of concord, for "what is our religion, if not peace in the Holy Spirit?"⁴⁵

⁴⁰ LB VII, 662A-B.

⁴¹ LB VII, 664B.

⁴² LB VII, 651-652; Adrian VI was elected pope in January 1522 and crowned in August of the same year, but passed away on September 14, 1523.

⁴³ LB VII, 653-654.

⁴⁴ H.M. Pabel, 'The Peaceful People of Christ. The Irenic Ecclesiology of Erasmus of Rotterdam', in *Erasmus' Vision of the Church*, ed. H.M. Pabel (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1995), 57-93; see also M. Becht, *Pium Consensum Tueri. Studien zum Begriff Consensus im Werk von Erasmus von Rotterdam, Phillip Melancthon und Johannes Calvin* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2000), 25-214.

⁴⁵ CWE 8, Ep. 1202, lines 10-11. For a unique reference of Calvin to the Spirit of peace, see E.A. de Boer, 'Pagina Obscura in Geneva: a Fragment from a Sermon by John Calvin', *Calvin Theological Journal* 34 (1999): 162-179.

The concept of peace, and related concepts like concord, unanimity and harmony are also abundantly present in Erasmus' *Paraphrase* on Acts. Where there is not unanimity, there is not the church of Christ (*Non est Ecclesia Christi, ubi non est unanimitas*), he says in his commentary on Acts 1:14.⁴⁶ And this unanimity is exactly what Erasmus saw in the early church. Aside from the speaking in tongues and the miracles performed by the apostles, the greatest work of the Spirit of Pentecost is that he produced mutual benevolence and concord in all he inspired. The love of Christ joined this disparate group together with oneness of heart.⁴⁷ Luke, through Erasmus, calls upon Theophilus to note that the church took its beginnings from concord (*concordia*) and joy. "There must be concord where the Spirit is, the one who makes peace for all."⁴⁸ In his commentary on the final part of Acts 4, Erasmus says that the assembly prayed with one heart (*unanimiter*), and that nothing is as effective as the supplication of a church in harmony. So great was their agreement (*consensus*), so profound their peace (*tranquillitas*) that you could say that they were all one of heart and one soul (*cor unum, & animam unam*); they were all ruled by the one Spirit of Jesus.⁴⁹ Time and again Erasmus stresses concord, peace and oneness of heart as something, which the individual believer and the church as a whole cannot do without.⁵⁰

This emphasis on peace and concord has an influence on the images Erasmus uses to describe the church. Especially the flock or sheepfold of Christ is an image often used by Erasmus to portray his irenic concept of the church.⁵¹ In his commentary on Psalm 23 he says that a sheep is "a harmless and peaceful animal, armed neither with horns, nor with teeth, nor with shoes, nor with nails; nor is it fortified with poison for its own defense."⁵² This is what the church in Acts looks like amid the storms of an opposing world. Another image used by Erasmus is that of a temple where the Holy Spirit lives. In his defense before the Jewish council Stephen says that they, the apostles, are not against Moses, God or the temple, but that they are building a spiritual temple in which God takes special delight.⁵³ Erasmus acknowledges that the Gentiles are part of the flock and temple of Christ. Twice he says that the Gentiles are in partnership

⁴⁶ LB VII, 664A.

⁴⁷ LB VII, 674D-E.

⁴⁸ LB VII, 675A-B: *Non potest non esse concordia, ubi est Spiritus ille pacificator omnium*.

⁴⁹ LB VII, 683A-B.

⁵⁰ See e.g. LB VII, 689F, 705E, 730E.

⁵¹ See e.g. LB VII, 664B, 665A, 698B; see H.M. Pabel, 'The Peaceful People of Christ', 61-65, for other images used by Erasmus in his works.

⁵² H.M. Pabel, 'The Peaceful People of Christ', 58.

⁵³ LB VII, 691F-692A; see also 692B, 695E.

(*consortium*) with the Jews in the Gospel⁵⁴, while the eunuch in Acts 8 becomes a portrait of the people of the Gentiles eager to learn Christ.⁵⁵

It should, however, be stressed that the peace and concord of the church is, for Erasmus always based in Jesus Christ. Jesus handed himself over to suffering and death to cleanse and establish his church.⁵⁶ It is, after all, the church of Christ where unanimity and concord reigns. Therefore, whoever wishes to be regarded as a disciple of Jesus, must be joined to the fellowship of the church.⁵⁷ It is only in Christ that the church can be pure and holy and teachable.⁵⁸

In his *Ratio verae theologiae* and in the preface to the third edition of the *Enchiridion* Erasmus gives his most elaborate description of the church. He imagines the church to be a social order consisting of three concentric circles with Christ being the common midpoint. Closest to the midpoint is the first circle, which contains the clergy. However, this privileged position does not mean that the clergy by itself constitutes the church, for they are merely servants of the church.⁵⁹ Erasmus is very clear on this point. The true pastor prefers that disciples belong to Christ rather than to himself, and from Christ he takes the food with which to feed the flock. Others take the disciples of Christ, and make them their own disciples. They wish to be the authors of evangelical doctrine, though in fact we are nothing other than its stewards (*dispensatores*).⁶⁰ It is the duty of a good pastor to abstain on account of the weak from every human reward, even avoiding no task in promoting the welfare of the flock.⁶¹ And when a new apostle has to be chosen in the place of Judas, Erasmus paraphrases Peter's words to say: "Our task is simply this, that exercising care over the Lord's flock, we provide for it from the food of evangelical teaching."⁶²

It can be noted from the above that the image of the church as a flock or a sheepfold, so abundantly used by Erasmus, finds its logical extension in the image of the shepherd. In the beginning and at the end of his speech in Acts 2, Peter is portrayed as a (gentle) shepherd⁶³, while in Acts 9:32 Erasmus describes him as a vigilant and energetic shepherd, thereby giving

⁵⁴ LB VII, 708F-709A, 717C.

⁵⁵ LB VII, 701B; see also 673A.

⁵⁶ LB VII, 746D.

⁵⁷ LB VII, 664A.

⁵⁸ LB VII, 684F, 742B.

⁵⁹ H.M. Pabel, 'The Peaceful People of Christ', 68-70.

⁶⁰ LB VII, 748C.

⁶¹ LB VII, 748F.

⁶² LB VII, 665A.

⁶³ LB VII, 669D, 672E.

us an example of a good shepherd.⁶⁴ It is not for nothing that Herod hoped that if the shepherds were removed, the flock would be scattered.⁶⁵ Paul is also described as fulfilling everywhere the role of shepherd, refreshing the souls of the believers with sacred preaching.⁶⁶ Based on the example of the apostles, Erasmus calls upon the clergy of his own day to care with like zeal and integrity for the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them bishops (*Episcopi*) and overseers (*inspectores*); they are to see to it that the sheep of Jesus Christ lack no food and that they behave towards the congregation of God not as wolves but as true shepherds.⁶⁷ The task of the shepherds, as has already been noted, is to feed the flock with the evangelical teaching. Therefore, Erasmus often calls the clergy (evangelical) teachers (*doctores*)⁶⁸ or catechists (*catechista*).⁶⁹ To the chosen bishops the stewardship of Gospel teaching is entrusted, and only he is worthy of this office that acknowledges and preaches the free gift of God through faith.⁷⁰ The disciples, says Erasmus in reaction to the signs of Pentecost, are only instruments (*organi*) through whom the Holy Spirit puts forth his voice.⁷¹

Erasmus does, however, reserve the first position for Peter. Sometimes Peter and John together are called the chief of the apostles⁷² or the two princes of the apostolic order⁷³, but in general Peter receives sole honor for being the chief apostle. When Peter takes the word on the day of Pentecost, Erasmus wants his readers to recognize Peter's rank and authority. He, as the chief bishop, unsheathed the sword of the Spirit. Erasmus adds that the eleven apostles were with him in order to avoid the impression that Peter usurped absolute power.⁷⁴ But in all this Peter remained the prince of the apostles (*Apostolorum princeps*)⁷⁵ and the chief shepherd of the church (*summus Ecclesiae Pastor*).⁷⁶ The authority of Peter, and with him the eleven other apostles, is clear from the history of Philip's preaching in Samaria. The work that was begun by Philip needed to be approved and completed (*comprobaretur & absolveretur*) by Peter and John, who were sent for that purpose from Jerusalem.⁷⁷ And although Philip was allowed to

⁶⁴ LB VII, 705F, 706C.

⁶⁵ LB VII, 715B.

⁶⁶ LB VII, 745E.

⁶⁷ LB VII, 748A.

⁶⁸ See e.g. LB VII, 701B, 730E, 731E.

⁶⁹ LB VII, 733B.

⁷⁰ LB VII, 666A.

⁷¹ LB VII, 667C; Erasmus often uses the word *organum*.

⁷² LB VII, 676B, 699D.

⁷³ LB VII, 675C.

⁷⁴ LB VII, 669B.

⁷⁵ LB VII, 707A.

⁷⁶ LB VII, 707F.

⁷⁷ LB VII, 699D.

baptize, the imposition of hands through which the Holy Spirit was conferred was reserved for the apostles alone and for their successors (*solis Apostolis & horum vicariis servabatur*).⁷⁸ Thus, while avoiding the impression of tyranny and the usurpation of absolute power, Erasmus still maintains the primacy of Peter and the apostolic succession.

In order to be equal to so great a task the apostles needed to be strengthened by a power sent forth from heaven. This task of preaching and teaching would not be accomplished by human strength but by the help of the Spirit. “For a new teaching you need a new Spirit – an abundant Spirit, a celestial Spirit, a fiery Spirit.” In this way the apostles would become fit instruments of the Spirit. As God did with the prophets and holy men of old, so the apostles will receive the same Spirit, with this difference that now he will be poured out upon the world in great abundance.⁷⁹ Through this abundant Spirit the apostles would be able to preach the Gospel in the face of an opposing world, but through this Spirit they also received a heavenly eloquence⁸⁰, knew when to perform a miracle⁸¹, and understood where to preach the Gospel next.⁸² It is the Spirit of Jesus who exerts his power through his ministers.⁸³ However, when commenting on Peter’s divine knowledge in the episode of Ananias and Sapphira, Erasmus says that the gift of the Spirit, which Peter then possessed is not continual for all⁸⁴, thereby either implying that it was only continual for some (apostolic succession), or that this was a typical apostolic gift that seized when the apostles passed away. But despite this qualification, the Spirit is still poured out abundantly on the congregation. The Spirit produces mutual benevolence and concord in the congregation⁸⁵, and he enriches the believers and the congregation with celestial gifts.⁸⁶ He was the breath from heaven, coming from where Christ had gone, breathing eternal life into souls, giving strength and vigor to the weak and the faint.⁸⁷ At Pentecost God poured out his Spirit abundantly – previously he was only given to Moses and some of the prophets, but now he was poured out upon all the nations of the whole world.⁸⁸ And from this abundance Erasmus sees an abundant growth of the church in Jerusalem and

⁷⁸ LB VII, 699E.

⁷⁹ LB VII, 661D-F.

⁸⁰ LB VII, 666D.

⁸¹ LB VII, 675E.

⁸² LB VII, 713A, 731B.

⁸³ LB VII, 688C-D.

⁸⁴ LB VII, 685E: *nec enim hoc donum Spiritus, quod tum aderat Petro, perpetuum est omnibus*; see also LB VII, 717E, where it is said that Paul excelled in all the apostolic gifts, implying that the apostolic gifts were something separate and different from the common gifts of the believers.

⁸⁵ LB VII, 674D-E.

⁸⁶ LB VII, 717D-E, 741E.

⁸⁷ LB VII, 666F.

⁸⁸ LB VII, 669E-F.

further, provided the disciples persevered in the teaching of the apostles.⁸⁹ This teaching Erasmus adorns with adjectives like heavenly⁹⁰, sacred⁹¹, salvific⁹² and evangelical.⁹³ The fragrance of the evangelical teaching was daily spreading further.⁹⁴

6.3. Conclusion

Erasmus is under no illusion that the church will have to endure the storms from an opposing world. But as for the church internally, he only wants the believers to live harmoniously together, having peace with one another. He wants them to agree with one another in harmonious agreement. The task of the pastors is to facilitate this peace by providing the flock with the food of evangelical teaching. For Erasmus, therefore, the peace of the church is ultimately grounded in the evangelical doctrine. It should he added, however, that doctrinal conflict was far from the mind of the irenic Dutchman; his difference with Luther was, therefore, not based on doctrinal grounds, but on Lutheranism's astounding and insoluble conflict of convictions. The Holy Spirit, visibly sent on the day of Pentecost to supply illumination to the mind and eloquence to the tongue, is the heavenly power behind the preachers and their preaching. All of this, Erasmus hopes, will lead to the restoration of the church, a church that is healed of the serious sickness that was so prevalent in his day. Erasmus' dedication to Pope Clement VII shows his hope that this successor of Peter will take the task of restoration and healing to hand.

⁸⁹ LB VII, 674A.

⁹⁰ LB VII, 676D.

⁹¹ LB VII, 704F.

⁹² LB VII, 722D.

⁹³ LB VII, 770D.

⁹⁴ LB VII, 686C.

7. THOMAS DE VIO CAJETAN

In Roman Catholic circles he is mostly remembered as the leading Thomist of his day; Protestants remember him for his role at Augsburg, during the opening scene of the Reformation. However, as has already been indicated in paragraph 2.2.3, there is more to be said about Cardinal Thomas de Vio Cajetan. His biblical commentaries represent a sixteenth-century development in Roman Catholicism that was both significant and, in a sense, short-lived. The Council of Trent seemed to have closed the ranks on this development by fixing doctrines that were still being debated even in the Roman Catholic Church.¹ But the council could not stop this development from becoming known to the reformers. The presence of Cajetan's writings in Wittenberg as well as in the library of the Academy of Geneva is testimony to this fact.² It has even been suggested that, seeing that the works of Cajetan and Catharinus in the library of the Academy of Geneva contain no evidence of foreign provenance, they could have come from Calvin's own library.³ Whatever the case may be, the presence of these works shows the reformers' real interest in them.

7.1. Cajetan's exegetical method

The call for a return *ad fontes* did not only influence men like Johannes Reuchlin, Desiderius Erasmus and Jacques Lefevre d'Étaples, but also mainstream clergymen like Thomas de Vio Cajetan. During the first two decades of the sixteenth century the principles of this biblical renaissance, which included the reading of the text in the original languages and the studying of history and philology, had led to the establishment of 'trilingual' colleges or university faculties across Europe. This development was promoted and supported by Pope Leo X (and later Clement VII), who himself established a Greek 'gymnasium' in Rome. Cajetan was, therefore, part of a 'biblical movement' that did not only affect the humanists and the reformers, but that also influenced the Roman Catholic Church at the highest levels.⁴ Cajetan's

¹ J. Wicks, 'Catholic Old Testament Interpretation in the Reformation and Early Confessional Eras', in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament, the History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 2, ed. M. Saebo (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 622ff. See for the criticism on Cajetan's commentaries, especially by Ambrosius Catharinus, A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, ed., *Biblical Scholarship and the Church. A Sixteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Aldershot / Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 156-226.

² A. Ganoczy, *La Bibliothèque de l'Académie de Calvin* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1969), 95-99.

³ See J.-F. Gilmont, *John Calvin and the Printed Book*, transl. K. Maag [Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 72] (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2005), 141.

⁴ M. O'Connor, 'A Neglected Facet of Cardinal Cajetan: Biblical Reform in High Renaissance Rome', in *The Bible in the Renaissance. Essays on Biblical Commentary and Translation in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. R. Griffiths (Aldershot / Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), 83-89.

commentaries should, therefore, not primarily be seen as a justification of Roman Catholic doctrine against Protestant doctrine in the wake of his encounter with Luther in 1518, as is often assumed, but “as a ‘return to the sources’, in search of truth for the mind and guidance for the conscience – principles fundamental to any reform program, however un-programmatic.”⁵

In several documents Cajetan himself gives indications of his exegetical method.⁶ In his preface to the commentary on the book of the Psalms, Cajetan says that when he began to expound the literal meaning of the book of the Psalms, he discovered that there is no original Hebrew text. Therefore he has taken upon himself the task (with the help of others) of translating the Psalms from the Hebrew text that was circulating under the name of Jerome, and subsequently to expound it according to its literal sense.⁷ The same principles become apparent from the preface to his commentary on the Pentateuch, where he says that he is about to write on the five Mosaic books according to the literal sense, and in accordance with the Hebrew original. The Hebrew original he deems to be the text of Moses himself, and therefore Moses should be understood according to his own text, and not that of his translators. We are to embrace the authority of the Hebrew text, he says.⁸

For Cajetan, however, the literal sense also included figurative expressions whereby, for example, he understood the serpent in Genesis 3 to be a reference to the Devil. Cajetan’s understanding of the literal sense is, therefore, not literalistic. He grounded his preference for

⁵ M. O’Connor, ‘A Neglected Facet of Cardinal Cajetan’, 93; O’Connor proves that the conventional view that Cajetan’s commentaries were primarily a reaction against Protestant doctrine is unfounded. He does this by discussing the relative absence of references to contemporary error and heresy in Cajetan’s commentaries, Cajetan’s preoccupation with Biblical scholarship even before 1518, as well as his stated reasons for embarking on the work of commenting on Scripture.

⁶ See A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, ed., *Biblical Scholarship and the Church*, 154-156; T.A. Collins, ‘Cardinal Cajetan’s Fundamental Biblical Principles’, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 17 (1955): 363-378.

⁷ A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, ed., *Biblical Scholarship and the Church*, 267; for similar statements see Cajetan’s Preface to Job (“We now intend to explain the Book of Job in accordance with the literal sense of the Hebraic verity in the same way as we expounded the five Mosaic books and the remaining historical books of the Old Testament”), as well as his remark at the beginning of the Commentary on Matthew (“After, with the assistance of divine grace, we have expounded the Psalter literally, acquiescing in the prayers of many, we also intend to expound the New Testament literally, beginning with Matthew.”)

⁸ A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, ed., *Biblical Scholarship and the Church*, 272-273; see also pp. 276-277 for Cajetan’s defense of the importance of the original text against an accusation by the Parisian Theologians: “The fourteenth article. The second epistle of John does not so much demand explanation as correction. The article is not fully recited, for in the commentaries on the epistle I wrote that it does not so much demand exposition as correction since in many things it differs from the Greek text. Here it clearly appears that I spoke about the correction of words differing from the Greek text. If this is an error, why did Jerome labor for so long a time to correct the books of Sacred Scripture in accordance with the Hebraic verity? And why did Augustine refer readers to the Hebrew text for the correction of the books of the Old Testament, and to the Greek text for the correction of the books of the New Testament?”

the literal sense in the principle, inherited from Thomas Aquinas, that the Bible will not give a truth, which is necessary for salvation, only in an allegorical manner; such a truth will always appear elsewhere in Scripture in a literal sense. On that basis the interpreter's first endeavor should be to find the literal meaning of the text. Cajetan acknowledged that the New Testament sometimes applied texts from the Old Testament according to a mystical sense; he deems this to be a fulfillment of Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit, but not a model for human interpreters.⁹ Cajetan's search for the literal sense earned him the same accusation as Calvin would earn years later, namely that of being a Judaizer.¹⁰

Other important hermeneutical principles that Cajetan used were to expound Scripture in its context, and to understand the meaning of a text within the whole of Scripture. In the preface to his commentary on the Pentateuch he calls upon his readers not to cling unwaveringly to the authority of the doctors of the church, but to investigate a new meaning by looking at the text as well as its context, because God has not bound the exposition of Scripture to the meaning of the doctors, but to the meaning of the whole of Scripture. This, Cajetan adds, is subject to the censure of the church.¹¹ From his commentary on Joshua it can be seen that it is Cajetan's purpose to make the meaning of the text clearer to those who read and study the Bible. He wants to explain ambiguities and obscurities, and thereby give them a tool for accessing Scripture.¹²

Cajetan's commentary on Acts appeared in 1529 and, although barely more than a series of explanatory notes, it followed the principles set out in the prefaces and commentaries mentioned above. In contrast to Erasmus and Calvin, Cajetan gives very little indication of the state of Christianity in the apostolic age as contrasted with that of his own day.¹³ There are, furthermore, no indications of polemical intentions on passages where one would expect it

⁹ J. Wicks, 'Catholic Old Testament Interpretation in the Reformation and Early Confessional Eras', 619.

¹⁰ J. Wicks, 'Catholic Old Testament Interpretation in the Reformation and Early Confessional Eras', 623.

¹¹ A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, ed., *Biblical Scholarship and the Church*, 273. Despite his independence from the doctors of the church, Cajetan himself considers Jerome to be an important authority. Each of his commentaries on the Gospels is preceded by Jerome's life of that particular evangelist, while the first three Gospels are preceded by Jerome's preface to it. Furthermore, it is remarkable to see how, in his defense against the accusations of the Parisian Theologians, Cajetan is able to deny an accusation solely based on the fact that Jerome supports his position; see A.K. Jenkins and P. Preston, ed., *Biblical Scholarship and the Church*, 155.

¹² *Tria me movent post expositos libros Mosis ad scribendum super libros historiales Veteris Testamenti. Primum, difficultas rei gestae, vel quia obscure traditur, vel quia secus interpret eam reddiderunt. Secundum, ratio, tum verborum, tum factorum, quae ambigua videntur, virorum praesertim sanctorum. Tertium, imbecilitas multitudinis legentium studiose sacram scripturam, ut quae illis minus clara sunt, manifesta fiant*, on Joshua 1:1, ii, 1a.

¹³ R.C. Jenkins, *Pre-Tridentine Doctrine. A Review of the Commentary on the Scriptures of Thomas de Vio, Cardinal of St. Xystus, Commonly Called Cardinal Cajetan* (London: David Nutt, 1891), 1.

most. Despite its brief and non-polemical nature, Cajetan's commentary on the book of Acts can still serve to help shape the backdrop for Calvin's commentary on the same book.

7.2. Cajetan on Acts

A few general, though noteworthy, remarks about Thomas de Vio Cajetan's commentary on Acts might help lead the reader into this writing that, according to my knowledge, has not been translated before.

A first noteworthy aspect of Cajetan's commentary, although completely congruent with his exegetical method, is his interest in and attention to grammatical, historical, chronological and geographical detail. His quest for the literal meaning of the text is so strong that he pays attention to aspects most commentators would merely gloss over. Several times, for example, he makes mention of the fact that while Luke uses Greek active participles, the Latin does not have these and therefore "the translator" (*interpres*, i.e. Jerome) either uses periphrastic constructions or present tense participles to convey the intended meaning.¹⁴ And regarding the handkerchiefs or aprons that were used to heal the sick in Acts 19:12, Cajetan finds the time and space in his short commentary to remark: "I leave to the grammarians the question of whether the 'aprons' (*semicinctia*) are the articles which are worn around a man's loins, or whether they were belts (*semicingula*) with respect to their width."¹⁵ He seemingly also finds pleasure in pinpointing exact geographical locations. He identifies, for example, two cities named Iconium, one in Cilicia and the other in Lycaonia, making sure that he knows in which one Paul was located in Acts 14:1.¹⁶

A second general remark relates to Cajetan's application of his exegetical findings to his own time. According to Robert Jenkins "nothing indicative of the state of Christianity in the Apostolic age as contrasted with that of later ages occurs in it" (i.e. in Cajetan's commentary).¹⁷ Generally this rings true of Cajetan's commentary on Acts. Bridging the gap between the Biblical time and his own time, so characteristic of Calvin's commentaries, is not typical of the Roman Catholic commentator. There are, however, a few exceptions. Regarding

¹⁴ Thomas de Vio Caietanus, *Euangelia cum Commentariis Reverendissimi Domini Domini Thome de Vio, Caietani, Cardinalis Sancti Xisti, in quatuor Euangelia et Acta Apostolorum ad Grecorum codicum veritatem castigata, ad sensum quem vocant literalem Commentarii: cum indicibus oportunis, Recens in lucem editi* (Paris: Apud Iod. Badium Ascensium & Ioan. Parvum & Ioannem Roigny, 1532), 431 and 438. Hereafter this work will be referred to as TdVC with the page number, preceded by the relevant chapter and verse from Acts.

¹⁵ Acts 19:12, TdVC, 469.

¹⁶ Acts 14:1, TdVC, 459.

¹⁷ R.C. Jenkins, *Pre-Tridentine Doctrine*, 63.

communal living, as described in Acts 2:45, Cajetan says that no mention is made of a vow of poverty, something that was characteristic of monastic living in Cajetan's days.¹⁸ And again, when Stephen is buried, Cajetan comments that the festival of martyrs had not yet begun to be observed in the primitive church.¹⁹ And finally, speaking about the sin of simony, he says that anyone who would be buying the papacy or the office of cardinal would be buying the care of souls, which is a spiritual office.²⁰ In all these examples a subtle application and a hint of criticism of Papal practices can be detected.

A third noteworthy aspect of Cajetan's commentary is his predilection for using philosophical and Scholastic concepts. He was, after all, the leading Thomist of his time, a system hugely indebted to Aristotelian thinking. The man who spent the last part of his life writing commentaries on Scripture, expounding it according to its literal meaning, does not completely shed this medieval influence. Right at the beginning of his commentary, when comparing Jesus' actions with that of other holy men, he says that the latter performed their actions only with qualification (*secundum quid*), for none of the ancient fathers did anything without deficiencies. Only Jesus performed deeds without any defect, and only he taught perfectly. Only Jesus began and did and taught, simply (*simpliciter*) and absolutely.²¹ The Scholastic logical terms *secundum quid* and *simpliciter* form a correlative logical pair, and Cajetan was undoubtedly aware of this. In his commentary on Acts 2:36, where Cajetan comments on Peter's words about Jesus being both Lord and Christ, there seems to be an allusion to the Scholastic phrase *Christum secundum quod homo est*, that can be found in Thomas Aquinas.²² Again, Cajetan could not have been ignorant of the background of these loaded words. This inclination to the philosophical and Scholastic can also be seen in two remarks that are directly relevant to this study. Both are related to the subject of doctrine and teaching. In summarizing the four – not three²³ – aspects in Acts 2:42 in which the early believers persevered, Cajetan firstly mentions perseverance in the doctrine of the apostles. He then immediately adds as goal or purpose: in order to restore the intellect (*ad refectiorem intellectus*).²⁴ This addition becomes the more noteworthy once Cajetan's remark after the fourth aspect, prayer, is also noted: they had to persevere in prayers, in order to restore the

¹⁸ Acts 2:45, TdVC, 438.

¹⁹ Acts 8:2, TdVC, 447.

²⁰ Acts 8:20, TdVC, 448.

²¹ Acts 1:1, TdVC, 431.

²² Acts 2:36, TdVC, 437; see Aquinas, S.T. III, q. 16, a. 10.

²³ See the discussion about the marks of the church in paragraph 13.2.2.

²⁴ Acts 2:42, TdVC, 437.

affective emotions (*ad refectionem affectus*). Cajetan divides the human make-up into, at least, two parts: the intellectual and the affective, and doctrine is clearly related to the former. Does this typify Cajetan's view of doctrine and the act of teaching? This seems to be answered in the affirmative when, speaking about Paul's speech in Acts 20, Cajetan remarks that Paul was teaching the believers after the manner of disputation (*sed quod docebat eos modo disputatorio*) – that is to say, by producing reasoning or authorities from this source or that source in order that the truth might be more clearly perceived. Because people able to question either side of a debate easily come to the truth.²⁵ It seems that Cajetan had an intellectual understanding of doctrine and teaching, which was clearly influenced by his Thomistic background.

Leaving behind these general remarks, it is fitting to now turn to those aspects, which will reappear in the systematic part about Calvin's commentary on Acts.

Cajetan's view on the book of Acts, like Calvin's, can mainly be gauged from the introductory remarks. Cajetan has no separate *Argumentum*, but his comments on the first few verses reveal what could be described as a seminal view on Acts. After asserting that Luke is the author of the book of Acts²⁶, Cajetan makes a concerted effort to show that there is a conscious link and transition between Luke's first and second works. He says that the instructions given by Jesus in Acts 1:2 are probably the same as were recalled in the final chapter of the Gospel of Luke, so that the beginning of Acts can be considered a recapitulation of the ending of the Gospel of Luke.²⁷ This recapitulation continues until Acts 1:6, where Luke makes a transition to the words and deeds which had been passed over in silence in the Gospel.²⁸ The link between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts is further established by a grammatical-exegetical choice Cajetan makes in Acts 1:2. In a discussion of whether the words 'by the Holy Spirit' in this verse refer to 'instructed' or to 'chosen', Cajetan opts for the latter. Since Luke was about to write the Acts of the Apostles he wisely stated beforehand that Jesus had chosen the apostles through the Holy Spirit. Had Luke not done so, this second account concerning the acts of men would have been joined incongruently with the first account (i.e. with the Gospel about Christ). But now the second account concerns the acts of men chosen by Jesus himself through the

²⁵ Acts 20:7, TdVC, 471.

²⁶ Acts 1:1, TdVC, 431.

²⁷ Acts 1:2, TdVC, 431.

²⁸ Acts 1:6, TdVC, 432.

Holy Spirit, and so it squares with the first account.²⁹ For Cajetan it is, therefore, important to show that both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts have a divine origin – the one tells about the actions and teaching of Jesus Christ, the other about the actions and teaching of the apostles whom Jesus chose through the Spirit. Christ’s inspired choice of the apostles determines the authority and validity of the book of Acts.

Besides Luke’s authorship and the connection with Luke’s Gospel, Cajetan’s overall view on the book of Acts seems to be determined by the evangelization of the Gentiles. In a subtle reference to the programmatic Acts 1:8, Cajetan says in his commentary on Acts 11:20 that Luke tells us every location where the beginnings of the conversion of the Gentiles were taking place. First the eunuch converted by Philip, and then the centurion and his household converted by Peter; and now, in Acts 11, he tells of the Gentiles converted in Antioch.³⁰ Although Cajetan acknowledges the order of Jews and Gentiles (“The translator seems here to have introduced the Gentiles in fitting order, as first he describes the Jews who believed; and then the Gentiles, both the women and the men”³¹), he also maintains that in the period between Christ’s first and second comings there is “no distinction between Jew and Gentile”.³²

In Cajetan’s description of the conversion of the Gentiles two things are noteworthy. Firstly, he repeatedly explains that Jerome tends to call the Gentiles Hellenists or Greeks, and that it can either be a reference to an ethnic group or to Gentiles. In all these cases, however, he chooses the latter meaning.³³ And secondly, Cajetan very often describes the process of reaching the Gentiles with the use of the verb *euangelizare*. It is a term that Calvin, in his substantial commentary, never uses, except for two instances (comm. on Acts 8:35 & 14:5) where he merely acknowledges Luke’s use of this word. Cajetan, on the other hands, uses this word more than seven times in his short commentary. God gave his Spirit to the apostles in order for them to evangelize the world.³⁴ And Saul and Barnabas got the clear task to evangelize the Gentiles.³⁵ It is through this work of evangelizing that God was restoring his church:

²⁹ Acts 1:2, TdVC, 431; Cajetan says that the choice of the eleven to be apostles differed from the choice of Judas. His was also a choice by the Holy Spirit, for the sake of Christ, but not for his own sake.

³⁰ Acts 11:20, TdVC, 454.

³¹ Acts 17:12, TdVC, 465.

³² Acts 2:21, TdVC, 436.

³³ See Acts 14:1, TdVC, 459; Acts 17:4, TdVC, 464; Acts 17:12, TdVC, 465; Acts 18:17, TdVC, 467.

³⁴ Acts 15:16, TdVC, 461.

³⁵ Acts 13:2, TdVC, 456.

He symbolizes the church of Christ, the son of David, by image of the tabernacle of David. And by the image of the ruined materials he symbolizes spiritual ruin. The mystery is not so much that the tabernacle of David fell down, but that the Jews have fallen away from divine grace ... He begins to rebuild his ruins when he converts the Jews to the faith. And he erected that which is to be witnessed by the whole world when he gave the Holy Spirit to the apostles in order to evangelize the world.³⁶

The giving of the Holy Spirit, as referred to in this last citation, receives the necessary attention from Cajetan. Pentecost is a fulfillment of the promise made by Jesus when he was still with his disciples. After the resurrection Jesus had already given the Holy Spirit to his disciples in the form of a gust of wind, and this is repeated at Pentecost. Cajetan puts a lot of emphasis on the visible and the sensory nature of the Spirit's appearance. On the day of Pentecost the apostles were visibly (*in visibili signo*) and perceptibly (*in signo sensibili*) baptized with the Holy Spirit.³⁷ The coming of the Spirit took on manifest appearance (*ad sensum apparuisse*), such that a sound was perceived by their ears and that the onrushing gust was sensed both by their eyes and also by touch. The wind that filled the entire dwelling was perceived by all their senses, including touch (*ad hoc fuit ut ab universis etiam tactu perciperetur*). And upon each one of them rested the appearance of fire in the form of a tongue.³⁸ Also later in his commentary Cajetan emphasizes this sensory nature of the coming of the Spirit. The Samaritans, as well as later Cornelius and the people who were with him, received the Spirit in a way manifest to the senses (*in effectum sensibilem*).³⁹ Cajetan also refers to the laying on of hands for conferring the Holy Spirit as something that is manifest to the senses (*in effectum sensibilem*).⁴⁰

Cajetan does not neglect the fact that the external appearance has an internal effect. In his commentary on Acts 2:3 he says: "And here ends the description of the things which appeared (*apparuerunt*) – their effect (*effectus*), however, is [now to be] added."⁴¹ In the next verse he then speaks about the internal effect (*effectus internus*).⁴² And in his commentary on Acts 8:17 he says that the Samaritans received the Spirit's action of a purely internal grace in a perceptible way through baptism (*procul dubio in effectum sensibilem per baptismum acceperant*

³⁶ Acts 15:16, TdVC, 461.

³⁷ Acts 1:5, TdVC, 432.

³⁸ Acts 2:2-3, TdVC, 434.

³⁹ Acts 8:17, TdVC, 448; Acts 10:44, TdVC, 453.

⁴⁰ Acts 13:3, TdVC, 456; Acts 19:6, TdVC, 469.

⁴¹ Acts 2:3, TdVC, 434.

⁴² Acts 2:4, TdVC, 434.

ipsum in effectu solius gratiae internae).⁴³ However, this last reference shows that there is quite a substantial emphasis on the sensory appearance, whether in the speaking in tongues, in baptism, or in the laying on of hands. This emphasis seems to be at odds with Calvin's adagio that the external appearance is useless without the internal effect.

Cajetan says that the question whether the apostles were all speaking in one language which was understood by each of the speakers of all the other languages, or whether each of the apostles were speaking a language peculiar to different listeners, is an ancient question (*questio antiqua*). Cajetan himself chooses for the second option. The miracle was a diversity of speaking and not a diversity of hearing. The new miracle of the Holy Spirit was that the apostles were speaking the language peculiar to each of the men assembling.⁴⁴ And we should understand, the Roman Catholic commentator says, that the Holy Spirit not only bestowed totally different languages upon the apostles, but also diverse accents and idiomatic ways of speech belonging to the same language.⁴⁵

In the wake of Pentecost Christ established a communal living.⁴⁶ This entailed perseverance in the doctrine of the apostles, in order to restore the intellect (*ad refectionem intellectus*); sharing of goods and responsibilities of mutual service, whereby the effect of internal grace and constancy becomes apparent (*quae communicatio manifestus est effectus internae charitatis & constantiae*); the breaking of bread, whereby the sharing of property in common was restored (*communicatio redigebat propria in commune*); and prayers, in order to restore the affective emotions by petitioning God for perseverance in all these things (*ad refectionem affectus*).⁴⁷

When this last paragraph brings one to the subject of the church, it should be acknowledged that Cajetan has very little attention for the church in his commentary on Acts. He does not speak about the church very often, and never in a way that enables one to gauge how he fundamentally views the nature of the church. Overlooking the whole of his commentary, it seems that Cajetan's understanding of the church should be viewed from a different angle, for Cajetan understands the church in terms of the offices. In a sense the offices are an extension of God's own office. Cajetan declares simony a sin, for it involves selling God's gift, which

⁴³ Acts 8:17, TdVC, 448.

⁴⁴ Acts 2:6, TdVC, 435,

⁴⁵ Acts 2:11, TdVC, 435.

⁴⁶ Acts 2:45, TdVC, 438.

⁴⁷ Acts 2:42, TdVC, 437.

truly God alone shares with mankind so that man might participate in God's own office of caring for souls.⁴⁸ And Paul and Barnabas, calling themselves lights to the nations, speak the truth, for they have received the mandate to carry out the functions of the office of Christ.⁴⁹

Although Cajetan speaks about other offices (he mentions deacons, elders, and presbyters, which he prefers to call bishops), he has an especially high view of the apostolate – he calls it a habitation (*commoratio*) and a house of celestial conversation (*domus coelestis conuersationis*). Part of this high view is a form of apostolic succession, as can be seen from the discussion about Judas: if Judas had died in the peace of Christ, he would have left successors of his apostolic habitation. But now that apostolic house has been made desolate; nor is there an imitator such as might dwell in it.⁵⁰

Among the apostles Peter is clearly the first. When Peter stands up to preach on the day of Pentecost, Cajetan's short comment speaks volumes: "Peter is always found to be the first (*semper Petrus invenitur primus*)."⁵¹ And when Peter and John are sent by the apostles to Samaria in Acts 8:14, Cajetan feels the need to defend the primacy of Peter. For if generally speaking, the person who is being sent is subordinate to the one sending him, one finds different ranks even among the other apostles. Thus the apostles send him not by imperious command but by fraternal charity and fraternal impetus, just as at certain times many monastics send a greater ranking brother and chapter head to present their letters to the pope or to the emperor.⁵² Finally, a most striking comment is found in Cajetan's commentary on Acts 12:5. The church's prayer for the imprisoned Peter leads Cajetan to comment: "Hence it clearly is evident to what extent the prayers of the church are able to benefit an imprisoned pontiff."⁵³ Apparently no further explanation is needed – the prayer for the imprisoned Peter is on the same level as prayer for an imprisoned pope.

One of the tasks specifically reserved for the apostles, and therefore for the bishops, is the laying on of hands.⁵⁴ Through the laying on of hands the apostles have been granted the grace of conferring the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ This seems to highlight, in general, how Cajetan views the nature of the sacraments as well as, for that matter, the Word. Both these means, the sacraments and the Word, carry the grace in themselves and convey this grace *ex opere operato*. In his

⁴⁸ Acts 8:21, TdVC, 448.

⁴⁹ Acts 13:47, TdVC, 458.

⁵⁰ Acts 1:20, TdVC, 433.

⁵¹ Acts 2:14, TdVC, 436.

⁵² Acts 8:14, TdVC, 448.

⁵³ Acts 12:5, TdVC, 455.

⁵⁴ Acts 8:17, TdVC, 448.

⁵⁵ Acts 8:21, TdVC, 448.

commentary on Acts 20:32, where Peter commends the Ephesians to God and to the Word of his grace, Cajetan says that Peter is calling ‘the Word of God’ that speech which is productive of the grace by which we are saved, for by speaking it God himself produces it.⁵⁶

7.3. Conclusion

Thomas de Vio Cajetan had made a conscious decision to expound the literal sense of Scripture, in this particular case the book of Acts, a decision that would not have gone unnoticed among the leaders of the Reformed movement. This has led to a commentary that, in many senses, would have pleased someone like John Calvin. Cajetan expounded the literal and simple sense of Scripture, even drawing the consequences of this exposition by subtly criticizing a few Papal practices, e.g. simony. However, it cannot be denied that the Papal theology and doctrine keeps creeping into Cajetan’s exegetical work. His view on the Spirit, the church, the offices and the sacraments are, ultimately, not that different from others from the same side of the confessional fence. Calvin would surely also have noticed this aspect of Cajetan’s commentary.

⁵⁶ Acts 20:32, TdVC, 472.

“I will pour out...”

PART 3
SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS (I)

8. THE HOLY SPIRIT

As indicated in the Introduction to this study, as well as in paragraph 4.1, Calvin views the uniqueness of Pentecost in the phrases “I will pour out” and “upon all flesh”. These phrases have become the framework for the two parts of the systematic analysis. In this first part the phrase “I will pour out” will be explored and worked out from the whole of Calvin’s commentary on the book of Acts.

8.1. The Spirit as divine Gift

The first issue that presents itself in Calvin’s emphasis of the phrase “I will pour out” regards the ‘object’ of God’s pouring out: the Holy Spirit. Instead of starting with the gifts of the Spirit, as so often happens, the Spirit must first be understood as being himself the Gift (*donum*).¹ Of course, for Calvin there is no separation between the Spirit as Gift and the gifts that flow from him. When God is said to pour out his Spirit, Calvin understands it to mean that from the Spirit God causes an infinite variety of gifts to flow out to men. Nonetheless, he learns from this the following valuable doctrine (*utilis doctrina*): that God can give us no more excellent gift than the grace of his Spirit, and that all else is worthless without this gift. We can receive no good things until we have the Holy Spirit given to us. He is the key that opens the door to all spiritual blessings and to the kingdom of God.² For Calvin there is no separation between the Gift and the gifts, but he does make a distinction between them. The Spirit clearly has priority over the gifts that flow from him.

While the Spirit is the Gift, Calvin primarily identifies Christ as the Giver. In his commentary on Acts 2:36 and 38 Calvin calls Christ the Giver of the Holy Spirit (*Spiritus sancti datorem esse*)³, and when commenting on Acts 11:16 he says that Christ, when bestowing the visible graces of the Spirit on his apostles, made it clear that the Spirit is in his hands.⁴ However, it should also be noted that Christ gives to us what he himself has received as a gift. He was himself once anointed by the heavenly Father with the power of the Holy Spirit.⁵ The Spirit

¹ For the Spirit as Gift see comm. on Acts 2:14, COR XII/1,54,25-26; comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,56,16-17; comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,26-27; comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,156,5-6.

² Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,56,11-22.

³ Comm. on Acts 2:36, COR XII/1,78,22-23; comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,31.

⁴ Comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,335,21-23.

⁵ Comm. on Acts 4:27, COR XII/1,132,8-9; comm. on Acts 10:38, COR XII/1,321,12-14. See W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1957), 134-137.

was poured on Christ so that the latter might subsequently enrich us from his own abundance.⁶ In light of this sharing of the gift of the Spirit (from the Father with the Son and from the Son with all the believers), Calvin can easily switch between the names ‘Spirit of Christ’ and ‘Spirit of God’, although in his commentary on Acts he has a clear preference for the name ‘Spirit of God’.⁷ Even though all of this is not at odds with the doctrine of the ‘filioque’, which receives scant attention in Calvin’s writings⁸, it rather serves to emphasize the salvation-historical sending of the Spirit by both the Father and the Son, with the Son being the primary Giver of the Spirit. This is summed up in Calvin’s commentary on Acts 2:33:

It can verily be said that Christ either sent the Spirit from himself, or that he was sent from the Father; from himself, because he is God eternal; from the Father, because, as he is a human being, he receives from the Father what he gives to us.⁹

Although the Spirit is a gift given by both the Father and the Son, this does not detract from the fact, that, for Calvin, the Spirit himself is God.¹⁰ When discussing the sign of the wind on the day of Pentecost, Calvin explains this sign as Scripture’s way to describe that particular hypostasis of the divine essence (*divinae essentiae hypostasis*), which is in itself incomprehensible.¹¹ Calvin also does not let the chance go by to use the clear reference in Acts 5:4 to again assert the divinity of the Spirit. He who lies to the Spirit lies to God, for the divinity of the Holy Spirit is clearly attested for in this way of speaking.¹² And in his commentary on Acts 13:2 Calvin proofs his knowledge of the history of the early church when he discusses

⁶ Comm. on Acts 10:37, COR XII/1,320,26-27; see also Inst. 2.15.2-5.

⁷ W. Balke, ‘Calvijn en de Pinksterprediking’, in *Verbi Divini Minister*, ed. J. van Oort, A. de Reuver and M. Verduin (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1983), 33, suggests that, according to Calvin, Scripture often speaks about the third Person in the Trinity as the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, while he was called the Spirit of God under the law and the prophets. Especially this last part seems to be at odds with the amount of times Calvin calls the Spirit ‘the Spirit of God’ in his commentary on Acts (at least 30 times), in comparison to ‘the Spirit of Christ’ (only twice); see also Inst. 3.1.2.

⁸ W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 126-130.

⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:33, COR XII/1,75,10-13; see also W. Balke, ‘Calvijn en de Pinksterprediking’, 32-33.

¹⁰ See A. Baars, *Om Gods Verhevenheid en Zijn Nabijheid. De Drie-eenheid bij Calvijn* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2004), 322-326; S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943), 25-26.

¹¹ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,48,12-14; for the use of similar terms see comm. on Acts 23:8, COR XII/2,238,2-3, where Calvin acknowledges that the Pharisees recognized the particular Person of the Spirit in the being of God (*ut propriam Spiritus hypostasim agnoscerent in Dei essentia*).

¹² Comm. on Acts 5:4, COR XII/1,140,9-11; see also Calvin’s use of this text in Inst. 1.13.15.

the heresies of Macedonius¹³ and Sabellius.¹⁴ Against Macedonius he proofs the divinity of the Spirit from the history of the appointment of Paul and Barnabas. For there is nothing more peculiar to God than that he alone governs the church by his power and authority. And this is exactly the right the Spirit arrogates to himself when he orders Paul and Barnabas to be separated to himself. It is God alone who places teachers over his church, and Calvin confirms this with a reference to Acts 20:28. Calvin concludes: “We therefore infer that the Holy Spirit is truly God, because his authority suffices for electing pastors.”¹⁵ Following this refutation of one ancient heresy, Calvin takes the opportunity to tackle another one – the fabrication of Sabellius (*Sabelli commentum*), who said that the name Spirit does not designate a substantial reality (*hypostasis*) but that it is merely an epithet (*epitheton*). According to Calvin the expression ‘the Holy Spirit said’ would be senseless if this was the case. Instead Calvin confesses that the Holy Spirit is a Person subsisting in God (*sit persona vere in Deo subsistens*).¹⁶ Whereas Calvin has no qualms mentioning the names of Macedonius and Sabellius, Chrysostom, who was a contemporary of Macedonius, chooses to speak in general terms about ‘the opponent of the Spirit’ who called the Spirit a creature (*Quomodo ergo, Spiritus sancti inimice, audes illum dicere creaturam?*).¹⁷ But he nonetheless asserts the divinity of the Spirit in no uncertain terms. From the beginning of his commentary Chrysostom emphasises that the promise of the coming of the Spirit can only be of comfort if the Spirit is in no way inferior to the Son.¹⁸

¹³ Macedonius was bishop of Constantinople from ca. 344 until 360, when he was deposed for his anti-Trinitarian views; see for more on this heresy J.A. McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 279.

¹⁴ Sabellius (early third century) was part of a theological movement now called modalistic Monarchianism. According to him Father, Son and Spirit were three modes or forms of revelation within the one God. God had, so to speak, three different faces through the history of revelation; see for more J. van Genderen, *Oriëntatie in de Dogmageschiedenis* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1996), 39. According to A. Baars, *Om Gods Verhevenheid*, 330 & 334-335, Arius and Sabellius are mentioned in Calvin’s commentaries as representatives of Subordinationism and Monarchianism (also called Modalism) respectively. Sabellius is only mentioned in Calvin’s commentary on Acts 13:2 and 1 John 2:22; see also Inst. 1.13.4-5.

¹⁵ Comm. on Acts 13:2, COR XII/1,365,18-20; see also comm. on Isaiah 48:16, CO XXXVII,184,19-24, where Calvin makes exactly the same point as in Acts 13:2; Inst. 1.13.14, where Calvin detects the divine majesty of the Spirit in the fact that he shares in the highest authority to send prophets.

¹⁶ Comm. on Acts 13:2, COR XII/1,365,6-26; the peculiar characteristic of the Spirit, according to Calvin, is that the Spirit is the power and efficacy (*virtus et efficacia*) of the activity of the Father and the Son (Inst. 1.13.18). However, this does not detract from the fact that, for Calvin, the Spirit is a divine Person, see W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 8-12.

¹⁷ *Hom.* 2, PG 60,30.

¹⁸ *Hom.* 1, PG 60,20.

8.2. The Spirit as Guide

Calvin's profession of the divinity of the Spirit affords him the freedom to identify the Spirit at work in the book of Acts with characteristics and with names that are only appropriate for one who is truly God.¹⁹ Among the names that Calvin ascribes to the Spirit, are: 'Master' (*magister*), for he is the only one who can teach us how to pray, not merely by teaching us the right words, but by governing our internal affections²⁰; 'the Searcher of hearts' (*cordium cognitor*), thereby showing the fallacy of Ananias and Sapphira's attempt to shut God out of their plans²¹; 'the Author of all miracles' (*qui miraculorum omnium author fuit*), whereby not only Peter's healing of Aeneas but all other miracles are ascribed to the Spirit²²; and 'his own Interpreter' (*interpretes suos*), when he uses Paul to explain what David meant in Psalm 2.²³

However, the most frequent designation Calvin gives to the Holy Spirit in his commentary on Acts is that of a Guide or a Leader (*dux*).²⁴ He uses this designation in several different ways. Firstly, the Spirit is the Guide in relation to the believers' and the church's reading and teaching of the Word.²⁵ This has been the case, not only in the time of Acts, but through all ages. Therefore, Calvin can say that David, when uttering Psalm 69 as used by Peter in Acts 1:20, was not seeking vengeance when he spoke these words, but that he had the Holy Spirit as his Guide and Director (*dux ac director*).²⁶ Furthermore, the Spirit was Peter's Guide when the apostle rebuked his enemies in Acts 4, and he will be the Guide (*dux*) for all who follow Peter's example.²⁷ The same applies to the apostle Paul when he had to pass judgment on the sorcerer

¹⁹ A. Baars, *Om Gods Verhevenheid*, 322, indicates that in his Institutes Calvin follows two tracks to prove the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Firstly he shows that Scripture ascribes works to the Spirit that can only be done by God, and secondly Scripture explicitly calls the Spirit 'God'.

²⁰ Comm. on Acts 1:14, COR XII/1,35,14-16.

²¹ Comm. on Acts 5:9, COR XII/1,143,10-12.

²² Comm. on Acts 9:34, COR XII/1,285,18-20.

²³ Comm. on Acts 13:33, COR XII/1,390,3-4.

²⁴ Calvin also uses the words *director/rector* or *praeses* to convey the same idea. See also Calvin's sermon on Acts 2:36-38, SC 8,11,4-5 where he says that the Spirit directs and governs (*conduyse et gouverne*) the believers; sermon on Acts 5:1-6, SC 8,129,2-3, where Calvin says that, although the Spirit does not descend on us in visible form as on the apostles, God still directs (*gouverner*) his church by his Holy Spirit as he has done from the outset; sermon on Acts 6:7-9, SC 8,216,37-38.

²⁵ For the close relationship of the Word and Spirit in Calvin's theology, see Inst. 1.9.3 and 4.8.13; see also W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 218-233; S. Scheld, 'Die missionarische Verkündigung des Paulus in Calvins Kommentar der Apostelgeschichte', in *Creatio ex amore. Beiträge zu einer Theologie der Liebe*, ed. T. Franke, M. Knapp, J. Schmid (Würzburg: Echter, 1989), 317-318.

²⁶ Comm. on Acts 1:20, COR XII/1,40,25-27.

²⁷ Comm. on Acts 4:11, COR XII/1,122,32-33; see also Calvin's sermon on the same verses, SC 8,84,23-28 & 85,3-9, where he says that Peter could not have spoken as he did if his mouth was not guided by the Holy Spirit. He would have been powerless to do anything without God working in him by his Holy Spirit. So let us learn that it is the Spirit of God who gives us strength of character.

Bar-Jesus (or Elymas) in Acts 13:10. Calvin says that Paul's judgment may seem to be too hot-tempered, but he ultimately had the Spirit as his Guide (*dux*), and therefore his zeal was above reproach.²⁸ The guidance of the Spirit is, however, not only meant for the apostles. When believers have the Spirit as their Guide and Director (*dux ac director*) they will be able to judge any doctrine from no other source than from Scripture alone, for he is the Spirit of discernment.²⁹ Calvin assures his readers that Word and Spirit will always be present with the believers. This is the conclusion he draws from the visible graces of the Spirit that were conferred on the Samaritans – thereby God establishes for ever the authority of the Gospel and testifies that the Spirit will always be the Governor and Director (*praeses ac director*) of the faithful.³⁰ All of this confirms Calvin's programmatic statement in the *Argumentum* to his commentary on Acts, namely that the Christian church began to exist in its legitimate form only when the apostles were endowed with new power (i.e. the Holy Spirit), and started preaching about Jesus Christ.³¹

Secondly, and related to the Spirit's guidance in speaking and understanding the Word, is his guidance in the apostles' performance of miracles. Words and works are, after all, a holy knot, which may not be dissolved. The works, which include miracles, are like seals that establish the truth of the teaching.³² Therefore it is not surprising to hear Calvin speak about the Spirit being a Guide to the apostles in their performance of miracles. In his commentary on Acts 3:4 he is clear that the apostles could not do miracles as often as they wished, but that they had the Spirit of God as their Guide and Director (*dux ac director*).³³ The same we find in his commentary on Acts 9:34. Calvin here says that the apostles were not provided with such power of the Holy Spirit that they were free to heal all the sick. Rather the Spirit, who was the Author of all miracles (*Spiritus quidem, qui miraculorum omnium auctor fuit*), stirred Peter's heart with secret inspiration and directed his tongue at that moment to speak the words of healing to Aeneas.³⁴ Even more striking is Calvin's description of Paul's healing of the cripple in Acts 14:9. On the one hand Calvin sees the Spirit working in the cripple, preparing his mind

²⁸ Comm. on Acts 13:10, COR XII/1,370,4-5; in another instance Calvin says that zeal is of little value when it is not controlled by reason and prudence, in other words when the Spirit of God is not its guide, comm. on Acts 5:17, COR XII/1,147,33-34.

²⁹ Comm. on Acts 17:11, COR XII/2,105,25-27.

³⁰ Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,18-23.

³¹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,29-31.

³² See Calvin's description of the teaching and acts of Jesus Christ as a holy knot in his commentary on Acts 1:1, COR XII/1,16,15-19; see his sermon on Acts 3:6-13, SC 8,58,11-13, where he also uses the image of a seal that authenticates a letter, thus showing the correct relationship between teaching and miracles. Miracles should never be dealt with apart from the teaching.

³³ Comm. on Acts 3:4, COR XII/1,95,18-23.

³⁴ Comm. on Acts 9:34, COR XII/1,285,13-14 & 18-20.

and making him capable of this new experience. On the other hand the reformer describes the Spirit as the one Guide and Teacher (*dux et magister*), which the apostles had for working miracles. This, however, does not only apply to the physical performing of the miracles, but also to the ability of the apostles to see the faith in the one to whom the miracle is performed. The cripple's faith was revealed to Paul by the secret inspiration of the Spirit.³⁵ In summary, as often as the Lord had determined to show his power in some kind of miracle through the apostles, he directed them by the secret influence of his Spirit (*arcano Spiritus impulsu*).³⁶

A third aspect of the Spirit as Guide is his involvement in the government of the church. In governing the church we should not attempt anything without the Spirit as Guide and Presider (*dux et praeses*).³⁷ The meeting in Jerusalem in Acts 15 proves this point. Calvin sees in this meeting the living image of a proper council where the truth of God puts an end to all controversies. Wherever the Spirit presides, he puts an end to all disagreement, and he is the Leader (*rector*) that directs the tongues of those who lead the church as well as urging the rest of the believers to obedience.³⁸ In the decisions of this meeting the apostles and presbyters show that the Spirit was their Guide and Presider (*dux et praeses*), so that they could write: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."³⁹

In his treatise against the Council of Trent Calvin also touches on this point. He acknowledges that councils are to be honored by the godly as God's usual remedy for curing the diseases of his church. This is the case when pious and holy pastors meet to determine what the Holy Spirit had commanded.⁴⁰ However, according to Calvin this is not the case in Trent.⁴¹ He accuses the pope of thinking that he can send and recall the Spirit as he wishes⁴², and challenges the Council to prove that they are assembled in the name and under the auspices of Christ in order to convince people that the Spirit really presides in their meeting.⁴³ Furthermore, in reaction to Bishop Cornelius' prefatory remarks at the opening of the Council, where he said that the pope came as a light into the world, Calvin asks whether the Council,

³⁵ Comm. on Acts 14:9, COR XII/2,8,2-6 & 14-16.

³⁶ Comm. on Acts 9:39, COR XII/1,289,17-19; in this same passage Calvin also says that Peter was convinced that God was the Guide and Director (*dux et auspex*) of his journey to Joppa.

³⁷ Comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2,23,1-5.

³⁸ Comm. on Acts 15:12, COR XII/2,46,24-28.

³⁹ Comm. on Acts 15:28, COR XII/2,58,1-4; see also Inst. 4.9.11.

⁴⁰ *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,379.

⁴¹ *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,389: ... credamus eorum vaticinio nihil minus, quam a spiritu Dei ipsos gubernari.

⁴² *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,403: Quasi vero semper fascinat as hoc stupore teneant hominum mentes, spiritum sanctum e coelis elicit, papae nutu ... Quis ferat tantam impudentiam, ut spiritum emittat homo, et quoties libuerit revocet?

⁴³ *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,404.

after such an insult to the Son of God, can still pretend that the Holy Spirit presides.⁴⁴ For Calvin the truth must decide whether or not the decrees of the Council proceeded from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

The Spirit's designation as Guide is, fourthly, emphasized by the role that he plays in determining Paul's missionary travels. The Spirit prohibits Paul from speaking about Christ in certain places. Calvin draws the conclusion that this fact should have been an encouragement to Paul, for thereby he knew that he had the Spirit of God as the Guide (*dux*) of his life and actions. Paul had not been appointed the apostle of only one place or a few cities; rather, his field of work was wide and extensive, and therefore he needed the extraordinary direction of the Spirit.⁴⁶ In Acts 17 Paul chooses to preach in Thessalonica while passing by Amphipolis and Apollonia, by no means obscure cities. Calvin is uncertain about the reason for this decision, but he has no doubt that Paul followed the guidance of the Spirit.⁴⁷ What was uncertain in Acts 17, is clear in Acts 19:21 where it is said that Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem. Calvin comments that Paul made up his mind for his journey by the inspiration of the Spirit. And even though the actual result of the journey was disappointing (Paul was arrested in Jerusalem), this makes no difference, as God often rules the believers while concealing the outcome from them.⁴⁸ And even when Paul knows the outcome, namely that incarceration and persecution awaits him in Jerusalem, he still follows the secret leading or inspiration of the Spirit, for he knew that the Spirit was the Author and Guide (*author et dux*) of his journey.⁴⁹ Speaking of persecution, in his commentary on Acts 7:55, where Stephen is described as being full of the Spirit and turning his eyes to heaven, Calvin says that with the Spirit as our Guide and Leader (*director et dux*) we should also ascend in spirit into heaven, as often as we are pushed into a corner by enmity.⁵⁰

From the above two distinctive lines emerge, both pertaining to the Spirit as Guide.⁵¹ On the one hand the close relationship between the Spirit and the Word can be distinguished, a

⁴⁴ *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,397-398.

⁴⁵ *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,389.

⁴⁶ Comm. on Acts 16:6, COR XII/2,71,28-32 & 72,5-7.

⁴⁷ Comm. on Acts 17:1, COR XII/2,95,10-12.

⁴⁸ Comm. on Acts 19:21, COR XII/2,164,26-27 & 165,1-3.

⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 20:22, COR XII/2,183,12-16.

⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 7:55, COR XII/1,223,25-27.

⁵¹ Similar aspects can also be seen in Erasmus' *Paraphrases*. Through the Spirit the apostles would be able to preach the Gospel in the face of an opposing world, but through this Spirit they also received a heavenly eloquence

fundamental principle in Calvin's theology.⁵² In one of the clearest passages on this principle in his commentary on Acts, Calvin, as he so often does, seeks the middle way between the dead letter on the one hand, and the vague inspirations of the fanatics on the other. Scripture, he says, does not allow for a separation between the external Word and the Spirit; rather, it unites the ministry of men with the secret inspiration of the Spirit.⁵³

We must preserve the balance, which Luke establishes here, that we obtain nothing from the hearing of the Word alone, without the grace of the Spirit, and that the Spirit is conferred on us not that he may produce contempt of the Word, but rather to instill confidence in it in our minds and write it on our hearts.⁵⁴

This principle returns time and again in Calvin's commentary on Acts. For example, during Peter's speech in Acts 10 the Lord poured out his Spirit to show that he does not send out teachers for the purpose of beating the air with the sound of empty words, but so that he might work powerfully through their words, and quicken their words by the power of his Spirit for the salvation of the godly. In this way the elect can feel within themselves the harmony of the external Word and the secret power of the Spirit.⁵⁵ And in his commentary on Acts 25 Calvin says that the preaching would have little or no effect unless the Spirit affects hearts inwardly.⁵⁶ It can thus be said that the Spirit acts as a Guide in and through the Word, and this applies to both the church and the individual believer. In this Calvin is in line with Chrysostom, as can clearly be seen from the Greek father's definition of what Pentecost is. Pentecost, he says, is the time when the sickle was to be put to the harvest and the ingathering was made. He then, subsequently, equates the sickle both with the Word and with the Spirit. This is no contradiction or dilemma, as Spirit and Word go together.⁵⁷

On the other hand, however, there is a less familiar line in Calvin's Pneumatology, namely that of the Spirit's guidance without a direct link to the Word.⁵⁸ "Calvin speaks again and again

(LB VII, 666D), knew when to perform a miracle (LB VII, 675E), and understood where to preach the Gospel next (LB VII, 713A).

⁵² Inst. 1.9.3 and 4.8.13; see also I.J. Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism. A Commentary* [Columbia Series in Reformed Theology] (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 54-60; B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 4.

⁵³ Comm. on Acts 16:14, COR XII/2,77,9-11.

⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 16:14, COR XII/2,77,16-19.

⁵⁵ Comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,327,30-33 & 328,10-12.

⁵⁶ Comm. on Acts 25:19, COR XII/2,270,3-5.

⁵⁷ *Hom.* 4. PG 60,41.

⁵⁸ I.J. Hesselink, 'Governed and Guided by the Spirit. A Key Issue in Calvin's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit', *Zwingliana* 19/2 (1993): 161-171; see also B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 197-203; Y. Cheng,

of the Spirit as governing, guiding and leading the Christian in experiential ways that are apparently independent of any concrete scriptural teaching – though not, it must be added, in any way contradictory to it.”⁵⁹ This line in Calvin’s thought emerged above with regards to the doing of miracles and with regards to Paul’s missionary travels. “In short, the Spirit at times gives seemingly independent and secret guidance.”⁶⁰ This ‘secret guidance’ of the Spirit seems to gain the character of a *terminus technicus* in Calvin’s writings, including his commentary on Acts.⁶¹

In commenting on Acts 8:32, Calvin says that it is through God’s providence that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading this specific passage; it was put into his hand by the secret direction of the Spirit (*occulta Spiritus directio*).⁶² In Acts 27 Paul says that those on board the ship should have listened to him and not have set sail from Crete. Calvin comments that even if we read of no special revelation having been given to Paul, he was conscious of the secret direction of the Spirit (*arcana Spiritus gubernatio*), so that he, who had the Spirit of God guiding him, could confidently assume the role of an admonisher.⁶³ An interesting case arises in Acts 21:4, where Calvin asks the question how the brothers, through the Spirit of prophecy, can advise against something that Paul has testified that he is doing by the secret influence of the same Spirit (*arcano illius impulse se facere*)? Or is the Spirit maybe self-contradictory? His reply is that, although the Lord revealed to those brothers what was about to happen, they did not know what Paul’s calling demanded; the measure of their gifts did not stretch that far. On the other hand the Lord wanted Paul to know what was awaiting him so that, after preparing himself properly, he could willingly and knowingly hasten to suffer anything.⁶⁴ By way of this explanation Calvin confirms that the secret guidance of the Spirit is never contradictory to the revelation in Christ and the Word. “However secretly, freely, or independently the Spirit may

‘Calvin on the Work of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts’, in *Calvin in Asian Churches*, vol. 3, ed. S.Y. Lee (Seoul: Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary Press, 2008), 130.

⁵⁹ I.J. Hesselink, ‘Governed and Guided by the Spirit’, 162. However, B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 200-201, shows that this does not only apply to Christians but also to the ungodly, although Calvin generally avoids designating the Spirit as the source of the secret impulse in the ungodly. Nonetheless, by a secret impulse the ungodly are led beyond the purpose of their own minds.

⁶⁰ I.J. Hesselink, ‘Governed and Guided by the Spirit’, 163; see also *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,609, where Calvin speaks about a special inspiration of the Spirit, which is always to be observed in the extraordinary acts of the saints.

⁶¹ B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 197-203, identifies at least four contexts in which the secret impulse of the Spirit functions: 1) those instances where there is no objective revelation; 2) in prayers, which apparently are not guided by the testimony of the Word; 3) in certain extraordinary and apparently unwarranted actions of believers; 4) and when the apostles work miracles. For instances in Calvin’s commentary on Acts, see his commentary on Acts 8:32, 9:34, 9:39, 11:21, 11:28, 14:9, 16:6, 20:22, 21:4, 27:22.

⁶² Comm. on Acts 8:32, COR XII/1,255,28-31.

⁶³ Comm. on Acts 27:22, COR XII/2,294,12-14.

⁶⁴ Comm. on Acts 21:4, COR XII/2,197,25-198,3.

operate in the lives of believers, that wisdom or counsel is consistent with the revealed Word.”⁶⁵

8.3. The power of the Spirit

“The Christian church began to exist in its proper form only when the apostles were endowed with new power (*virtus*), and preached that that unique Shepherd had both died and been raised from the dead...”⁶⁶ Calvin, in his *Argumentum*, connects the beginning of the church with the new power, the Holy Spirit. It is, therefore, not surprising that the power of the Spirit is an important feature of his Pneumatology in the book of Acts. Without the power of the Spirit the efficacy of the Word and the sacraments, and, in fact, the very existence of the church and of faith would have been in jeopardy.

The Spirit is the one who, in a plethora of ways, works in the believers. It is through the Spirit’s power (*virtus*) that Peter, a man who had denied Christ when a mere woman confronted him at Jesus’ trial, received fortitude to serve the Jewish leaders with a truly divine reply when he was on trial himself.⁶⁷ It was by the power (*virtus*) of the Spirit that Stephen could lift up his eyes in faith and see Christ standing next to the Father in heaven.⁶⁸ Stephen’s courage leads Calvin to the conclusion that, without the power of the Spirit, the believers’ courage will fail, not only in the face of death, but also at every rumor of danger, even at the rustle of a falling leaf.⁶⁹ The power (*efficacia*) of the Spirit also conquers the dignity of the flesh of the noblemen in Berea, so that they are willing to bear the cross and prefer the reproach of Christ to the glory of the world.⁷⁰ And it is the same power that, in general, opens the hearts of people to receive the Word, inwardly instructing their minds and drawing their hearts.⁷¹

However, as the citation in the beginning of this paragraph suggests, the Spirit’s power is most prominent in the apostles and their preaching. The power of the Spirit shines out in the

⁶⁵ I.J. Hesselink, ‘Governed and Guided by the Spirit’, 170.

⁶⁶ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,29-31.

⁶⁷ Comm. on Acts 4:8, COR XII/1,119,31-32 & 120,1-2.

⁶⁸ Comm. on Acts 7:56, COR XII/1,223,14-15 & 225,15-17.

⁶⁹ Comm. on Acts 7:56, COR XII/1,223,19-20. For the Spirit’s power working courage in the believers, see also comm. on Acts 10:14, COR XII/1,304,17-19; comm. on Acts 17:1, COR XII/2,95,19-21. For the image of the falling leaf, see also Inst. 1.3.2 and comm. on John 18:17.

⁷⁰ Comm. on Acts 17:11, COR XII/2,104,7-10.

⁷¹ Comm. on Acts 15:6, COR XII/2,36,4-7; comm. on Acts 2:37, COR XII/1,79,7-8; comm. on Acts 14:2, COR XII/2,4,10-11.

ministers of Christ⁷², working in them the eagerness to spread the Gospel⁷³, and giving huge successes as a result of their preaching.⁷⁴ And even though Paul lacked eloquence, the power of the Spirit still shone in his clumsy speech (although Calvin is quick to add that this does not prevent God from choosing ministers who are fluent in speech).⁷⁵

Apart from using human ministers, the Spirit primarily works his power through the preaching of the Word and the sacraments. Word and sacraments are inferior instruments (*inferius organum*) used by the Spirit.⁷⁶ They remain ineffective without the power of the Spirit.⁷⁷ Hence Calvin can say that the effectiveness of baptism does not lie in the outward signs but in the secret power of the Spirit in order that this washing may be effective in us.⁷⁸ The same applies to the laying on of hands, a rite that only has power and effect through the Spirit of God. That, Calvin says, must be the general opinion about all ceremonies.⁷⁹ Apart from Word and sacraments, miracles are another instrument used by the Spirit, especially during the initial stages of the church. By way of these means the Spirit shows that he governs the church by his power and authority.⁸⁰

8.4. Conclusion

For Calvin the Spirit, although being the Gift from God and Christ, is in no way less than them. Besides Calvin's explicit discussion of the divinity of the Spirit, this can also be seen from the fact that the Spirit is not only given *by* Christ, but also *to* Christ. Before Christ can give the Spirit, he is himself enriched with the Spirit. This shows similarities with the basic idea of Heribert Mühlen, followed by Volf and Lee, who said that Christ is both bearer and giver of the Spirit.⁸¹

Furthermore, Calvin ascribes to the Spirit titles and works that can only be true for one who is God. In his commentary on Acts the title of Guide (*dux*) is particularly prominent. The Spirit's

⁷² Comm. on Acts 20:29, COR XII/2,190,6-8.

⁷³ Comm. on Acts 18:1, COR XII/2,133,27-29.

⁷⁴ Comm. on Acts 8:26, COR XII/1,250,15-17; comm. on Acts 18:2, COR XII/2,134,15-17.

⁷⁵ Comm. on Acts 18:24, COR XII/2,148,18-20; see also S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvin* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943), 174.

⁷⁶ Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,222,17-23.

⁷⁷ Comm. on Acts 28:27, COR XII/2,315,11-13; see also comm. on Acts 11:21, COR XII/1,340,15-16. In his sermon on Acts 5:7-15, SC 8,136,11-12, Calvin says that God is working by the power of his Holy Spirit (*par la vertu de son saint Esprit*) to strengthen the Gospel more and more.

⁷⁸ Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,222,13-14; see also comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,335,12-15.

⁷⁹ Comm. on Acts 6:6, COR XII/1,168,29-32.

⁸⁰ Comm. on Acts 9:34, COR XII/1,285,18-20; comm. on Acts 9:39, COR XII/1,289,17-19; comm. on Acts 13:11, COR XII/1,371,28-30.

⁸¹ See the Introduction.

guidance through the Word as well as his secret guidance independent of the Word, are both indicative of the Spirit's important, if not constitutive, role in the origin of the early church. To make it tangible: when Paul decides to preach in Thessalonica (leading to a church being planted there) and not in Amphipolis and Apollonia, a normally assured Calvin is uncertain about the reasons for this decision. But he knows at least this much: it was by the guidance of the Spirit. One can hardly imagine a more constitutive act for the origin of the church (in this case the church in Thessalonica).

The Spirit guides the apostles in teaching the Word and knowing when to perform miracles; he guides the church in understanding and applying the Word; he determines the direction of the spreading of the Word. The Spirit's power seems to be at work at every juncture of the book of Acts. The new power from above, with the accompanying preaching, is indeed responsible for the origin of the church in its proper form.

9. THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Calvin uses two poignant images to illustrate how the Holy Spirit, the Gift, is the source of all other gifts; in receiving the Spirit, the believers are enriched with all other gifts. The first image is that of a spring, a single spring that can never run dry (*inexhaustus fons*).¹ From this spring an infinite variety of gifts flow out to the believers. The second image is that of a key. The Spirit is the key (*clavis*) that opens the door for us to enter into all the treasures of spiritual blessings.² Both images convey the element of an abundance of gifts, and are in line with Calvin's understanding of the phrase "I will pour out". The grace of the Spirit was rare and little known under the Law. Not that the ancients did not enjoy the gift of the Spirit, but under the Gospel the gifts of the Spirit have been more abundantly poured out and God has dealt with his church more bountifully.³ However, what does Calvin exactly mean with the gifts of the Spirit? In what follows, a brief and general overview will be given (par. 9.1), after which Calvin's specific view on the gifts in the book of Acts will be explored in more depth (par. 9.2 and 9.3).

9.1. General overview and distinctions

Just as Christ is the primary Giver of the Holy Spirit (see par. 8.1), he is effectively also the Giver of the gifts. After being himself anointed by the Father with the power of the Spirit (anointment being a metaphor of the gifts of the Spirit)⁴, Christ pours forth the gifts of his Spirit in full measure.⁵ However, this does not exclude the activity of the Holy Spirit himself, of whom Calvin says that he has entrusted (*deposuit*) gifts to individuals.⁶ Neither does it exclude the activity of God the Father, the source and one Giver of the grace of the Spirit.⁷ The gifts of the Spirit come from the Triune God.⁸

The gifts of the Spirit are varied, and they are distributed in varied ways. The history of Acts 21:4 displays this variety. There Paul, knowing that he had to go to Jerusalem, heard from the

¹ For the image of the Spirit as fountain of God's gifts, even for the unbelievers, see also Inst. 2.2.15.

² Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,56,12-14 & 20-22.

³ Comm. on Joel 2:28, CO 42,566; see also comm. on Acts 19:4, COR XII/2,154,24-29.

⁴ Comm. on Acts 10:38, COR XII/1,321,11-14 & 19-20.

⁵ Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,22,24-26; see also P. Elbert, 'Calvin and the Spiritual Gifts', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22/3 (1979): 235-256; Y. Cheng, 'Calvin on the Work of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts', in *Calvin in Asian Churches*, vol. 3, ed. S.Y. Lee (Seoul: Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary Press, 2008), 131.

⁶ Comm. on Acts 18:27, COR XII/1,150,36-37.

⁷ Comm. on Acts 8:17, COR XII/1,243,21-25.

⁸ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin, an Introduction to His Thought* (London / New York: Continuum, 1995), 78.

disciples in Tyre that he should not set foot in Jerusalem. But how do the brothers advise through the Spirit against something that Paul has testified that he is doing by the guidance of the selfsame Spirit? Is the Spirit self-contradictory? Calvin replies that there are different gifts of the Spirit, and being strong in one gift does not necessarily mean strength in another. The brothers in Tyre clearly received the gift of revelation, of knowing what was going to happen to Paul, but the measure of their gifts did not stretch far enough to also know what Paul's calling demanded.⁹ In another instance, Calvin says that Paul was not strong in eloquence, but that his speaking ability was sufficient to make the name of Christ known. However, there are also eloquent ministers chosen by God. This is due to the fact that the gifts of the Spirit are distributed in numerous and varied ways (*ut varia est ac multiplex donorum Spiritus distributio*).¹⁰ Although the apostles all received the fullness of the Spirit, Calvin says, it does not signify an equal measure of gifts in each one, but sufficient for each to execute his office.¹¹ The gifts of the Spirit are given for the benefit and edification of the church.¹² In commenting on Simon's offer to buy the gifts of the Spirit in Acts 8:21, Calvin says that these gifts are not acquired by money, but are given by the gratuitous kindness of God for the edification of the church (*Ecclesiae aedificatio*). He goes on to elaborate: "... that each may strive to help his brothers according to the limit of his ability; that each one may unassumingly apply the gift that he has received for the common benefit of the church."¹³ And in his commentary on Acts 18:27 Calvin confirms once more that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were entrusted to individuals for the edification of the church (*ad Ecclesiae aedificatio*).¹⁴

When speaking about the gifts of the Spirit, Calvin's vocabulary is fluid. Not surprisingly, he most often uses the term *donum*. However, on a regular basis he would also use the term 'graces' (*gratiae*), thereby stressing the gracious character of these gifts.¹⁵ In some instances

⁹ Comm. on Acts 21:4, COR XII/2,197,25-33.

¹⁰ Comm. on Acts 18:24, COR XII/2,148,18-24; see also comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,29-30.

¹¹ Comm. on Acts 2:3, COR XII/1,50,4-7.

¹² See P. Elbert, 'Calvin and the Spiritual Gifts', 238-240; D. Mashau, 'John Calvin's Theology of the Charismata: Its Influence on the Reformed Confessions and Its Implications for the Church's Mission', *Missionalia* 36/1 (2008): 89-90; L. Sweetman, 'The Gifts of the Spirit: A Study of Calvin's Comments on 1 Corinthians 12:8-20, 28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11', in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. D.E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1976), 274-284; see also Calvin's comm. on Acts 8:16, Romans 12:7-8, 1 Corinthians 14:12 and 1 Peter 4:10.

¹³ Comm. on Acts 8:21, COR XII/1,246,20-24.

¹⁴ Comm. on Acts 18:27, COR XII/2,150,34-37; in his *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,613, Calvin says that the Spirit gives the gift of interpretation to those whom he thinks fit to give it to, for the common edification of the church (*in communem ecclesiae adificationem*).

¹⁵ See for *gratiae* Calvin's commentary on Acts 9:17, 10:44, 11:16 and 19:1-2, often qualified with 'visible' (*visibiles*). E. Evans, 'Theologian of the Holy Spirit', *Reformation & Revival. A Quarterly Journal for Church*

the term ‘miracles’ (*miracula*) can also be found in the context of Calvin’s discussion of the gifts.

When speaking about the healing power of Peter’s shadow in Acts 5:15, Calvin says that the gift (*donum*) of healing was used by the apostles for promoting the Gospel, whereas the Papists use their miracles (*miracula*) for the purpose of leading the world away from Christ.¹⁶ Here the term ‘miracles’ could possibly be perceived as only applying to what the Papists call miracles, and standing in opposition to the biblical gifts. However, from Calvin’s commentary on two other passages, Acts 10:44 and 19:1, it becomes clear that he has no problem calling, at least some gifts, miracles. On Acts 10:44 Calvin says that God confirms by a new miracle (*novo miraculo confirmat Deus*) that the Gentiles also share in the teaching of the Gospel, referring to the gifts of tongues and prophecy, while shortly afterwards talking about this new miracle as ‘these gifts’ (*haec dona*).¹⁷ And when opening his commentary on Acts 19, Calvin says that the church at Ephesus was provided with a miracle (*miraculum*; again referring to the gifts of tongues and prophecy), in that the visible graces of the Spirit were conferred on certain new disciples.¹⁸ It seems from the above examples that at least the gifts of healing and tongues¹⁹ are considered by Calvin to be miracles. As will be seen in the next paragraph, all the extraordinary gifts are generally considered by him to fall in this category. However, it should also be noted that gifts and miracles are not to be identified, as can be seen from Calvin’s summary in Acts 5:17, where he says that Luke has informed us that the church had been increased in numbers, that it had been equipped with various gifts (*varies dotes*), and that it excelled in miracles (*miracula*), thereby distinguishing between the two.²⁰

In a few instances there is also a combination of the term ‘gift’ with another concept, the term ‘sign’ (*signum*). This is particularly apparent in Calvin’s commentary on the phenomena associated with Pentecost.²¹ See, for example, Calvin’s remark on Acts 2:3, where he says that the tongues were a sign of the presence of the Spirit, and in the next sentence continues his thought by talking about the gifts.²² And in his commentary on Acts 10:44 the three terms (gifts, miracles and signs) are used together.²³ For Calvin the important aspect of the signs is

Leadership 10/4 (2001): 83-105, is therefore not accurate when he states that, for Calvin, “maturity in the Christian life lies in the graces rather than in the gifts of the Spirit”, as Calvin uses these terms interchangeably.

¹⁶ Comm. on Acts 5:15, COR XII/1,145,33-35 & 146,4-9.

¹⁷ Comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,327,19-20 & 24.

¹⁸ Comm. on Acts 19:1, COR XII/2,153,6-8.

¹⁹ For speaking in tongues as both gift and miracle, see Calvin’s comm. on Acts 2:4-6, 12 as well as Acts 2:38.

²⁰ Comm. on Acts 5:17, COR XII/1,147,1-2; see also comm. on Acts 6:8, COR XII/1,170,9-11.

²¹ See Calvin’s comm. on Acts 2:2-4.

²² Comm. on Acts 2:3, COR XII/1,50,2-6.

²³ Comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,327,19-24.

that it has a referential function. This enables him to take his readers along in observing the analogy (*analogia*) of the signs of wind, tongues and fire in Acts 2:2.²⁴

Clearly Calvin's stock term is 'gifts', but as a particular characteristic of these extraordinary gifts, he can also refer to some of them as miracles, divine works that surpass our natural understanding. Furthermore, these gifts do not function independently, but in their miraculous character they always refer to and strengthen the preaching of the Gospel, thereby functioning as signs.²⁵

This last aspect – the referential function of the signs – is crucial for understanding Calvin's view on the laying on of hands as the means by which the gifts of the Spirit were conferred, in particular during the time of the early church.²⁶ The laying on of hands was used for two purposes: to confer the visible graces of the Spirit on someone, or to dedicate someone to God (for the ministry or at the profession of faith).²⁷ In his debate with the Roman church on this point, Calvin admits that the laying on of hands was a sacrament for conferring the gifts of the Spirit. However, the laying on of hands is not a sacrament on the same level as baptism and the Lord's Supper, because there are perpetual and temporary sacraments, and the laying on of hands is an example of the latter. Calvin does not have a problem to continue using the laying on of hands to confirm adults in the profession of faith, although people should not think that the grace of the Spirit is tied to this ceremony.²⁸ But he accuses the Papists for prolonging this sign for conferring the gifts of the Spirit while the reality of the gifts does not exist anymore. The sign only has meaning when it signifies the reality, but since the reality was only for a time the sign had served its purpose.²⁹ Here the laying on of hands becomes illustrative for Calvin's view on the gifts in the book of Acts. This will receive more attention in paragraph 9.3, but in order to get there another distinction first needs attention.

²⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,48,3-4.

²⁵ See e.g. comm. on Acts 5:12, COR XII/1,144,14-15; comm. on Acts 14:3, COR XII/2,5,12-27.

²⁶ For more on the laying on of hands, see paragraph 14.2.3.

²⁷ Comm. on Acts 9:17, COR XII/1,275,14-16; the same is explained in Inst. 4.3.16. See Calvin's comm. on Acts 8:17, COR XII/1,243,21-25 and Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,156,7-14, for the first purpose, and his comm. on Acts 6:6, COR XII/1,168,21-32, Acts 13:3, COR XII/1,366,17-25 and Acts 20:8, COR XII/2,305,8-9, for the second purpose. For more on Calvin's view on the connection between the laying on of hands and baptism in the Roman Church, see H.H. van Alten, 'Die Belang van Onderrig in die Beginfase van die Kerk. Johannes Calvyn as Kategeet in sy Kommentaar op die Boek Handelingne', *Koers* 74/4 (2009): 661-682.

²⁸ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,156,21-32.

²⁹ Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,243,1-7.

9.2. Focus on the extraordinary

In his commentary on Acts Calvin often mentions or discusses the relationship between the gifts of the Spirit in a general sense and the extraordinary or special gifts of the Spirit.³⁰ By the former he means the grace of our renewal or regeneration (including faith, the remission of sin, newness of life, and the grace of sanctification), while the latter refers to the visible graces, “the gifts of tongues, prophecy, interpretation, healings, and similar things (*et similia notari*)...”³¹ The connection between the general and the extraordinary is undeniable, as Calvin articulates in his commentary on Acts 15:7 (“Peter connects the visible graces of the Spirit, which he mentions, to faith...”)³², but how exactly do they relate to each other? The former, although called ‘general’, is deemed by Calvin to be supreme (*praecipua*).³³ The latter, despite being considered by the reformer to be miracles (see e.g. his commentary on Acts 10:44), are ultimately only additions (*accessio*)³⁴ – added as a culmination to the Spirit of adoption that was already conferred on the Samaritans³⁵, God’s seal on the faith and godliness of those who heard Peter’s preaching³⁶, and signs of approval of the apostles’ teaching.³⁷ Calvin’s commentary on Acts 5:32 aptly illustrates this relationship. There the reformer says that the illumination of the Spirit precedes (*praecedat*) faith, seeing that it is the cause (*causa*) of faith, but afterwards (*postea*) other graces follow, in accordance with the words in Matthew 13:12: “To him who has, it will be given.”³⁸ The same can be seen from his commentary on Acts 2:18 – for those whom God has adopted into his family and designed by his Spirit to serve him, he afterwards (*postea*) also furnishes with new gifts.³⁹ Or in somewhat different, but very interesting, terms: “Those who believe in Christ are handsomely rewarded by God for their obedience.”⁴⁰ It is clear that the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit follow the general gifts in time as well as in priority.

³⁰ See e.g. comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,10-13; sometimes, e.g. in Acts 15:7, Calvin would also apply the qualification ‘special’ (*peculiari*) of the grace of the Spirit to faith – thus, also in this regard his vocabulary is flexible.

³¹ Comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,156,12-14.

³² Comm. on Acts 15:7, COR XII/2,36,11-13.

³³ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,22-23.

³⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,23-24; comm. on Acts 15:7, COR XII/2,36,12-13.

³⁵ Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,18-20.

³⁶ Comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,327,25-26.

³⁷ Comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,156,5-6.

³⁸ Comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,156,15-17.

³⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:18, COR XII/1,59,6-8.

⁴⁰ Comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,156,8-9.

Despite the importance of establishing this order in time and priority, Calvin makes a conscious effort to show that in most of the cases in the book of Acts where the gifts of the Spirit are mentioned, the focus is not on the gifts in a general sense, but in an extraordinary sense.⁴¹ It even seems as if the reformer considers the general grace of the Spirit to be a given, not in the least unimportant but nonetheless preceding the primary focus of the book of Acts. It is as if the reformer of Geneva looks at the extraordinary gifts as a particularization of faith.⁴² This already starts in Acts 1:5, where Calvin comments that it seems absurd that John's words, repeated by Jesus in this verse and spoken in general of the grace of regeneration, should be confined to the visible sending of the Spirit at Pentecost. His reply is that Christ did not baptize with the Spirit only at Pentecost, but that he had conferred this baptism on his disciples before, and thus baptizes all the elect daily.⁴³ The implication is that, in Calvin's view, the visible outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, although certainly not excluding the aspect of the general grace, has a different focus. This is confirmed when, in commenting on chapter 2:38, he says that this passage should not be taken as referring to the grace of sanctification, which is conferred upon all the believers in common. Rather, what is promised here to the listeners in Jerusalem is the gift of the Spirit of which they saw an example in the diversity of tongues.⁴⁴ This application of the gifts of the Spirit to the extraordinary and special, rather than to the general, subsequently becomes a pattern in all of the classical passages that deal with the visible outpouring of the Spirit.

Luke's comment in Acts 8:16, that the Samaritans had only been baptized in the name of Christ, brings Calvin to the question whether they were not yet sharers of the Spirit. However, in his answer he is very clear that in baptism the Spirit gives the believers all they need – the washing of sins, newness of life and sanctification. Therefore, the Samaritans, once baptized, were not only clothed with Christ but also with the Spirit. His conclusion is, therefore, that Luke is not speaking here about the general grace of the Spirit (*de communi Spiritus gratia*) by which God regenerates us, but about those special gifts (*de singularibus illis donis*) with which the Lord wished to endow the believers during the first days of the Gospel. In the same vein he then goes on to interpret John 7:39 – the disciples were at that stage not completely without the Spirit, as they would otherwise not have been able to believe and follow Christ,

⁴¹ See comm. on Acts 2:38, 5:32, 6:5, 8:16, 10:44, 11:16, 19:1-5.

⁴² See comm. on Acts 19:2, COR XII/2,153,30: ... *ut de eorum fide certius habeat examen*.

⁴³ Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,22,14-19.

⁴⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,25-27.

but rather the extraordinary gifts (*sed quia nondum pollebant eximiis donis*) with which the kingdom of Christ started shining since Pentecost were not yet given to them.⁴⁵ In his commentary on Acts 11:16 Calvin makes his readers aware of the fact that, generally speaking, Christ uses the word ‘Spirit’ to describe the gifts of tongues and similar things as well as the whole grace of our renewal, before choosing to apply it in this specific instance to the visible graces of the Spirit. This choice, however, does not mean a restriction, because the part represents the whole – in bestowing the visible graces of the Spirit on the apostles, Christ testified that he is the one and only source of purity, righteousness and complete regeneration.⁴⁶

Calvin’s commentary on Acts 19:1-5 is probably the most detailed on this point. Anticipating the conclusion of this history Calvin, right at the beginning of verse 2 already, states that Paul is not speaking about the Spirit of regeneration, but of the special gifts distributed by God at the beginning of the Gospel.⁴⁷ This is also his explanation for the Ephesian disciples’ ignorance about the Holy Spirit – after all, Paul was not speaking in general terms about the Spirit, and these men were not denying knowledge of the Spirit as such, but of the visible graces with which God had decorated the kingdom of his Son.⁴⁸ As a result Calvin, in his commentary on verse 5, can deny that the baptism of water was repeated. Rather, the name of baptism is transferred to the outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit, as was already seen in Acts 1:5 and 11:16.⁴⁹

For Calvin the special and extraordinary gifts of the Spirit take center stage in the book of Acts, while the general gifts of faith and regeneration are more of a background reality. While clearly understanding that both come from the same Spirit and cannot be separated, Calvin regularly indicates their distinction and chooses for the extraordinary as the most suitable explanation of key passages in the book of Acts. However, this begs the question how the reformer of Geneva, well known for his ability to apply the biblical text to the contemporary situation, understood the meaning of the extraordinary gifts to be relevant to his readers.

⁴⁵ Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,2-18; see also comm. on John 7:39.

⁴⁶ Comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,335,18-19 & 21-24.

⁴⁷ Comm. on Acts 19:2, COR XII/2,153,12-14.

⁴⁸ Comm. on Acts 19:3, COR XII/2,154,3-5; here Calvin introduces the style figure of metonymy, where the word ‘Spirit’ stands for something intimately related to it, in this case the visible gifts of the Spirit.

⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,156,1-5.

9.3. Meaning and relevance

In almost all the passages mentioned above Calvin includes an important qualification, whereby the occurrence of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit is limited to the specific time of the apostles.⁵⁰ What can only be vaguely seen in the word *tunc* in his commentary on Acts 5:32⁵¹, becomes apparent in other passages. In the beginning of the Gospel (*initium Euangelii*) God wanted some to be endowed with the special gifts of the Spirit.⁵² For a time (*ad tempus*) he wanted to show his church something like the visible presence of his Spirit; even the Papists, who want to perpetuate what was a temporary sign, are forced to acknowledge that the church received these gifts only for a time (*ad tempus*).⁵³ The miracle of the visible gifts was typical of the inauguration (*exordium*) of Christ's kingdom.⁵⁴ But this time is behind us, and Calvin is clear that these gifts have long since ceased in the church.⁵⁵ The extraordinary and visible gifts of the Spirit had been limited to the initial phase of the church.⁵⁶ Or at the very least, instances of them were so rare that we may conclude that they were not equally common to all ages.⁵⁷

However, the reasons that Calvin provides for this cessation make one suspect that his view is somewhat more complex than it appears at first glance. On the one hand Calvin indicates a very specific, divine purpose for the gifts, which limits its usefulness and existence until the point when the purpose has been achieved.⁵⁸ God's purpose with the visible gifts of the Spirit was to establish forever (*in perpetuum*) the authority of the Gospel and add luster to the

⁵⁰ See paragraph 4.1.1 where Calvin's commentary on Acts 2:17 and 2:38 has already been discussed on this point. The same is found in his commentary on Acts 5:32, 8:16, 10:4, 10:44, 10:46 and 19:1-2. This is the so-called Cessationist viewpoint, first offered by Augustine and taken over by people like Calvin and B.B. Warfield, see Y. Cheng, 'Calvin on the Work of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts', 122.

⁵¹ Comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,156,12-14: "... what is meant are the gifts of tongues, prophecy, interpretation, healings, and similar things, by which God was enriching his church at that time"; ... *donum linguarum, prophetiae, interpretationis, sanationum et similia notary, quibus Ecclesiam suam tunc Deus ornabat.*

⁵² Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,12; see for the same expression Calvin's comm. on Acts 19:2, COR XII/2,153,13-14.

⁵³ Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,21 & 243,4-5; see for the same expression Calvin's comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,29.

⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,29; see also Calvin's sermon on Acts 4:24b-31, SC 8,110,28-29, where he says that the miracles were only for a time and are no longer the same as they were back then.

⁵⁵ Comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,328,1-2; see also comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,58,30.

⁵⁶ See also Inst. 4.3.8 and 4.19.18.

⁵⁷ Comm. on Mark 16:17, CO 45,825.

⁵⁸ See Calvin's discussion of the laying on of hands in the context of dealing with the cessation of the gifts, comm. on Acts 8:16-17, COR XII/1,243,5-7, 26-28. In this context he says that the laying on of hands came to an end when the purpose of it was served. "But let us remember that the laying on of hands was God's instrument, thereby conferring the visible grace of the Spirit on his own at the appropriate time, and that since the church has been deprived of such gifts this act is merely an empty form."

kingdom of Christ, and thereby also testifying that the Spirit will always be the Governor and Director of the believers.⁵⁹ The gift of tongues was for the adornment and honor of the Gospel, and God gave it for the purpose of illuminating the greatness of the heavenly wisdom⁶⁰; the supreme glory of the Gospel was visible in the spiritual gifts.⁶¹ Once this purpose of establishing the Gospel and the kingdom in the initial phase of the church had been achieved, the gifts ceased to exist.

However, there are also passages where one gets the impression that the cessation of the gifts was not necessarily divinely intended, but was due to human error. In his commentary on Acts 10:4 Calvin puts it down to our own ingratitude that we do not see a richer abundance of the gifts of the Spirit today, but rather a withering away of the greater part of them.⁶² Ambition, ostentation and display corrupted the gift of tongues – referring to the case of the Corinthians – so that a little later (*paulo post*) God took away what he had given.⁶³

Calvin is, therefore, not wholly unambiguous in his view on the cessation of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.⁶⁴ On the one hand he closes the door on any expectation of receiving the visible and extraordinary gifts of the Spirit in his own days, because it had served its divine purpose of establishing the kingdom and the Gospel during those initial stages of the church.⁶⁵ But on the other hand he raises the expectation by exhorting his readers to eliminate the reasons

⁵⁹ Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,20-23 & 27-28; see P.F. Jensen, 'Calvin, Charismatics and Miracles', *The Evangelical Quarterly* 51/3 (1979): 140-142; E.A. de Boer, *The Genevan School of the Prophets* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, No. DXII] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012), 19-33.

⁶⁰ Comm. on Acts 10:46, COR XII/1,328,29-32.

⁶¹ Comm. on Acts 19:2, COR XII/2,153,23-25.

⁶² Comm. on Acts 10:4, COR XII/1,298,15-17; see also comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,58,32-33; comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,156,19-20. A similar argument can be found in Calvin's sermon on Ephesians 4:11-12.

⁶³ Comm. on Acts 10:46, COR XII/1,328,31-35.

⁶⁴ See Calvin's comm. on Mark 16:17, CO 45,825, where a good reflection of his ambiguity on this point can be found: "Though Christ does not expressly state whether he intends this gift to be temporary, or to remain perpetually in his church, yet it is more probable that miracles were promised only for a time, in order to give luster to the Gospel, while it was new and in a state of obscurity. It is possible, no doubt, that the world may have been deprived of this honor through the guilt of its own ingratitude, but I think that the true design for which miracles were appointed was, that nothing which was necessary for proving the doctrine of the Gospel should be wanting at its commencement. And certainly we see that the use of them ceased not long afterwards, or, at least, that instances of them were so rare as to entitle us to conclude that they would not be equally common in all ages." Something similar is found in Calvin's *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,628-629: "It is notorious that the gifts of the Spirit, which were then given by the laying on of hands, some time after ceased to be conferred. Whether this was owing to the ingratitude of the world, or because the doctrine of the Gospel had already been sufficiently distinguished by the miracles of nearly a hundred years, is of no consequence..." See also D. Mashau, 'John Calvin's Theology of the Charismata', 90-91; W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1957), 329-332.

⁶⁵ W.H.Th. Moehn, *God Roept Ons tot Zijn Dienst. Een Homiletisch Onderzoek Naar de Verhouding tussen God en Hoorder in Calvijn's Preken over Handelingen 4:1-6:7* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1996), 240-242, draws the same conclusion with regards to the miracles in Acts. The miracles were intended for the time of the apostles and do not exist in the same way anymore (SC 8,110,27-28); their purpose was to seal the Gospel (SC 8,138,29-30) and to glorify the kingdom of Christ (SC 8,139,7). See also Calvin's comm. on Acts 5:12, COR XII/1,144,17-19.

– ingratitude, ambition, and slothfulness – for the decline and the cessation of the gifts, thereby implying a possible restoration. In his commentary on Acts 5:32 he tells his readers that, if we want to be continually enriched with new gifts of the Spirit, we should lay bare the bosom of faith to God.⁶⁶

Calvin’s way of solving this ambiguity is to ‘reverse’ the order of his expositional thinking. First, as indicated above, he explains several times that the passages in question are not about the general grace of faith and regeneration, but about the extraordinary gifts given by the Lord for that specific time, thus narrowing down its scope. However, in subsequently applying these passages to his readers, he lifts this qualification and broadens his exposition in order to be relevant for his own time. In his commentary on Acts 2:38, for example, Calvin says that the words of Peter – “you shall receive the gift of the Spirit” – apply in a measure (*aliquatenus*) to the whole church.

For although we do not receive the Spirit to the end that we may speak with tongues, or be prophets, or cure the sick, or work miracles, yet he is given to us for a better use, that we may believe with the heart unto righteousness, that our tongues may be trained to true confession, that we may pass from death to life, that we who are poor and empty may be made rich, and that we may sound victorious against Satan and the world.⁶⁷

The same is found in his commentary on Acts 10:44, where the concession that the gift of tongues and other things of that kind have long since ceased in the church, is countered with the conviction that the Spirit of understanding and regeneration, united with the external preaching of the Gospel, thrives and will always thrive.⁶⁸ This broadening of the extraordinary gifts to the gifts in general allows Calvin to rebuke the ingratitude and slothfulness of his contemporaries⁶⁹ and exhort them to search for continual enrichment with new gifts of the Spirit.⁷⁰

When the question is asked as to the underlying principles, which allow – or maybe even force – Calvin to broaden the application, the following can be suggested. Firstly, Calvin’s view on the source of the gifts is an important factor. All the gifts, general and extraordinary, flow from

⁶⁶ Comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,156,17-19.

⁶⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,31-35 & 84,1-3.

⁶⁸ Comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,328,1-4; in his sermon on Acts 5:13-16, SC 8,140,27-33, Calvin acknowledges that miracles of healing are not manifested openly in our day, but that Christ is still our spiritual physician (*notre medecin spirituel*) whom we need to cure the illnesses of our souls.

⁶⁹ Comm. on Acts 10:4, COR XII/1,298,15-17.

⁷⁰ See comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,156,18-19.

the one source, the Holy Spirit of Christ.⁷¹ This single, divine source affords Calvin the freedom to apply, what was specifically meant for the early church, in a general way to the church of his own day. Secondly, Calvin leaves no doubt as to the value of the general and extraordinary gifts respectively. He deems the remission of sins and newness of life to be the most important (*praecipua*) gifts⁷², while the extraordinary gifts are, in some sense, mere additions. Even though we do not have the extraordinary gifts anymore, the Spirit is continually given us for a better use (*nobis tamen in praestantiozem usum datur*). It is therefore, in the reformer's view, no impoverishment when the contemporary church is promised the continued presence of the Spirit, not so much for the gifts of tongues and healing, but for faith, true confession and victory over Satan and the world.⁷³ And, finally, Calvin's emphasis on the close connection between the Spirit and the Word should be mentioned. According to the reformer the purpose of the Biblical miracles, including the extraordinary gifts, was to confirm the Word of God. Faith is, therefore, not based on the miraculous; rather, miracles are there to adorn the Word. And since the Word has been firmly established since the early beginnings of the church, the need for the extraordinary gifts has ceased. The preached Word is the real power, and the miracles we have today are those recorded in Scripture.⁷⁴

9.4. Conclusion

The nature of the book of Acts forces Calvin to consider and articulate his position on the gifts of the Spirit. Theology as well as reality play their part in determining his stance: theology, because God wanted to adorn the Gospel and establish the kingdom in the initial phase, after which the necessity of the gifts ceased (although human sinfulness also seems to have played its part in the cessation of the gifts); and reality, because the occurrence of the gifts after the initial stage was so rare, that one can conclude that they were only intended for that period. The cessation of the gifts, however, does not render these Scripture passages irrelevant for the sixteenth century. The reformer uses the fact that both the general and the extraordinary gifts come from the same Spirit, to move from the extraordinary to the general in his application. Ultimately the general gifts of faith, forgiveness of sins and new life are most important, and

⁷¹ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,56,12-14.

⁷² Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,22-23.

⁷³ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,35 & 84,1-3.

⁷⁴ P.F. Jensen, 'Calvin, Charismatics and Miracles', 142; see the explicit connection of Word and Spirit in Calvin's comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,328,1-4.

this fact, in Calvin's mind, validates his application of the extraordinary gifts to the general life of faith of the believers of his days. His application even seems to enter the realm of the allegorical, when the miracle of the speaking in tongues is applied as being true confession with the tongue, and when the gift of healing is applied to Christ as our spiritual physician.

10. THE OFFICES

The reason for discussing Calvin's view on the offices¹ at this point and not, for example, under the heading of his view on the church at which point it would have been equally appropriate, has to do with the close relationship he sees between the gifts of the Spirit and the offices.² The fullness of the Spirit, as envisioned in the phrase "I will pour out", is a direct precursor to the institution of offices in the New Testament church. Or stated differently, the Spirit and his gifts (chapters 8 and 9 of this study) inevitably lead to the offices. In commenting on Ephesians 4:11, one of the most important texts for basing his view on the offices³, Calvin says:

It may excite surprise, that, when the gifts of the Holy Spirit form the subject of discussion, Paul should enumerate offices instead of gifts. I reply, when God calls men, gifts are necessarily connected with offices. God does not confer on men the mere name of apostles or pastors, but also endows them with gifts, without which they cannot properly discharge their office. He whom God has appointed to be an apostle does not bear an empty and useless title, for the divine command and the ability to perform it, go together.⁴

Several times in his Acts commentary Calvin repeats this argument. In his commentary on Acts 3:26 Calvin applies this argument to Peter's words about God raising up his Son. In this regard he says, that to raise up a prophet is to furnish him with the gifts necessary for the fulfilling of his office.⁵ In this context it essentially refers to Christ himself, raised up by the

¹ For more on Calvin's view on the offices, see e.g. A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans: Dienende Kirche und Kirchlicher Dienst bei Calvin* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 177-342; B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 134-157; K. Runia, 'Calvijns Visie op de Ambten', in *Reformatie: Prediking en Ambt. Congresbundel 1992-1993*, ed. M. van Campen, W. de Greef and F. van der Pol (Woerden: Zuiderduijn Druktechnieken, 1994), 99-116.

² See B.G. Armstrong, 'The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Teaching on the Ministry', in *Calvin and the Holy Spirit. Papers and Responses Presented at the Sixth Colloquium on Calvin and Calvin Studies*, ed. P. de Klerk (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1989), 100; W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1957), 322-325.

³ See K. Runia, 'Calvijns Visie op de Ambten', 99 & 106. Calvin uses and refers to this passage right at the beginning of his commentary, comm. on Acts 1:2, COR XII/1,17,16 & 18,4-5; see also comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,362,1-2; comm. on Acts 21:7, COR XII/2,199,14-16.

⁴ Comm. on Ephesians 4:11, COR II/XVI,228; this commentary appeared in 1548, shortly before Calvin started working on Acts. See also comm. on Matthew 9:38, comm. on Luke 4:18, comm. on John 20:22, comm. on 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Inst. 4.3.11. On the link between gifts and offices, see B.G. Armstrong, 'The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Teaching on the Ministry', 105; S.J. Botha, 'Calvin's Preaching on the Church in the Letter to the Ephesians', *HTS* 54/1 & 2 (1998): 119-120; D. Mashau, 'John Calvin's Theology of the Charismata: Its Influence on the Reformed Confessions and Its Implications for the Church's Mission', *Missionalia* 36/1 (2008): 87.

⁵ Comm. on Acts 3:26, COR XII/1,114,25-27.

Father to perform his duty. However, in his commentary on Acts 5:30 Calvin, in reference to the exact same words of Peter, also applies it to human prophets, judges and other ministers (*Prophetas vel iudices vel alios ministros*). Here he comments that God will equip with special gifts those on whom he lays some special or distinguished task.⁶ This is also one of the reasons why Paul and Barnabas prayed whenever they appointed elders in the different churches. It was so that God might furnish with the necessary gifts those elected to be pastors.⁷ And thus, Calvin says, we receive from God those whom he has equipped with the necessary gifts and who have been fashioned and prepared by his hand. There is no need for the Spirit to cry to us from heaven that a man is called of God, says the reformer, whereby he implies that the Spirit is manifest in the gifts.⁸

These examples serve as sufficient proof of the close connection Calvin sees between the gifts and the offices. It also suggests that Calvin did not want to introduce a rigorous system of offices (as can also be seen from the fact that the number of offices changes in the different editions of his Institutes), but that he rather wanted to see the gifts and tasks, given by the Lord to his church, being fulfilled.⁹ This is fully congruent with what he himself writes in Inst. 4.10.30:

As for the external disciplines and the ceremonies, he has not chosen to prescribe for us in particular, and as it were word for word, how we must be governed, forasmuch as that depended upon the diversities of the times, and one and the same form would be neither appropriate nor useful to all ages... We have to conclude that these may be changed, new ones instituted, and that the previous ones may be abolished as may be expedient for the utility of the church.¹⁰

In addition, it is significant that, when Calvin wants to give a biblical basis for the offices of elders and deacons in the Institutes, he does not primarily resort to those texts that speak about elders and deacons, as he could have easily done, but he calls on the lists of the gifts of the Spirit as found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Here Paul speaks, among others, about the

⁶ Comm. on Acts 5:30, COR XII/1, 153, 11-16.

⁷ Comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2, 23, 5-6.

⁸ Comm. on Acts 13:2, COR XII/1, 364, 5-8; this is also Calvin's answer to the question how to know if a man has the Spirit, comm. on Isaiah 61:1, CO 37, 372: "If, therefore, having been appointed by the Lord he abound in the graces of the Spirit, and the ability which the calling demands, he truly has the Spirit." See B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 139-140.

⁹ K. Runia, 'Calvijn's Visie op de Ambten', 102, 105-107; B.G. Armstrong, 'The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Teaching on the Ministry', 100; F. Wendel, *Calvin, the Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (London: Collins, 1963), 303.

¹⁰ Inst. 4.10.30, CO 2, 889.

gift of governance and the gift of caring for the poor, which are the two gifts that become the basis for Calvin's view on the offices of elder and deacon respectively.¹¹

The close connection between the offices and the gifts necessarily also implies a connection with the fullness of the Spirit of Pentecost. Keeping in mind the central question of this study, the question arises whether Calvin's view on the nature and role of the offices in the newly established kingdom of Christ is colored by the connection he sees between the offices and the coming of the Spirit. An attempt will be made to answer this question by looking at the central aspects of Calvin's view on the offices as they appear in his commentary on Acts.

10.1. Government and order

In his dedicatory letter to Nicolaus Radziwil, Calvin urges the prince to establish a proper and well-ordered method of government, for this is the reliable protector of holy peace.¹² He then continues his thought by painting a very poignant image: "For it is well known that purity of doctrine is the soul of the church (*anima Ecclesiae*), so we may justifiably compare discipline to the sinews (*nervi*), by which the body is bound and connected together and so preserves its strength."¹³ A similar image can be found in his *Supplex exhortatio ad Caesarem*, where Calvin compares the pastoral office and all other matters of order to the body, whereas doctrine is the soul, which animates the body and makes it not to be a dead and useless carcass.¹⁴ From both these images it is clear that Calvin deems an orderly government to be an integral part of the body of the church.¹⁵ And Christ, says the reformer in his commentary on Acts 1:2, did not depart from this world without first having provided for this kind of government. Calvin calls it a perpetual government, twice adding that it is proof of Christ's will to provide for our

¹¹ Inst. 4.3.8 & 9, CO 2,782-783.

¹² Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,8,4-6. Besides Calvin's connection of the gifts of the Spirit with the offices, the reference to government being the protector of holy peace provides an additional link with the Holy Spirit. For in his commentary on Acts 13:52 Calvin says that there is no clearness of conscience, peace (*quies*) or joy except from the Spirit of God, referring to Paul's words in Romans 14:17 where righteousness, peace (*pax*) and joy are ascribed to the Spirit. A little further Calvin says that if faith is made secure by the protection of the Spirit, it will foster peace (*pax*) and spiritual joy in our minds, comm. on Acts 13:52, COR XII/1,408,29-32 & 409,6-9.

¹³ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,8,6-9. In this context *disciplina* should not be understood in the narrow sense of what is sometimes regarded as the third mark of the true church (church discipline), but rather as an alternative concept for 'order'. To proof this, at a meeting in Poitiers in 1557 the French churches, after drawing up a draft church order, expressed the wish for all the churches in France to meet in order "to formulate a confession of faith and a church discipline (*disciplina*)", by the latter meaning a church order, W. van't Spijker, *Calvin. A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 155.

¹⁴ CO 6,459-460. For the image of governance (or discipline, as Calvin calls it) as the sinew of the body, see also CO 1,658, CO 2,778, CO 10,224, CO 13,89.

¹⁵ In his sermon on Acts 6:1-6, SC 8,207,33-35, Calvin encourages good order and good administration (*bon ordre et une bonne police*) among the believers.

salvation, thereby implying that ecclesiastical governance has some kind of saving meaning for the body.¹⁶ This saving meaning of ecclesiastical governance has everything to do with the commands Christ subsequently gave his disciples in Acts 1:2, which Calvin understands to be the preaching of the Gospel.¹⁷ The preaching and teaching of the Gospel is at the heart of Calvin's understanding of church government.¹⁸

Christ's institution of church government in Acts stands in sharp contrast to the existing situation in the synagogue, where the whole government of the church had been wrecked by terrible devastation. Calvin ascribes this situation to the fact that the sect of the Sadducees was able to dominate the government. Therefore God has separated his church from the synagogue and left the latter to be immersed in extreme infamy, taking away any excuse for those who spurned the Gospel.¹⁹ In his commentary on Acts 22:3 Calvin similarly says that the government of the church had collapsed to such an extent that religion was not merely exposed to sectarian divisions, but was miserably torn to pieces.²⁰ There was no respect for discipline (*ratio disciplinae*), but disorderly (*confusa*) and uncivilized behavior reigned.²¹ These two contrasting governments – the Jewish leadership and the new government instituted by Christ – give Calvin the opportunity to impress on his readers, especially his royal dedicatees, to strive for the correct form of government, and it also allows him to contrast the government of the newly reformed church with that of the Papists.

As could be seen from the quoted passage to Radziwil, Calvin relates church government to order. In the opening statement of Inst. 4.3.1 Calvin also sets out to speak about the order by which God willed his church to be governed. In Calvin's thinking government by definition means order.²² God greatly approves a pure and holy polity in the church (*sancta puraque Ecclesiae suae politia*).²³ Shortly before advising Radziwil to establish a well-ordered method

¹⁶ Comm. on Acts 1:2, COR XII/1,17,25-27 & 18,1-3; see also comm. on 1 Thessalonians 5:12, CO 52,172; comm. on 1 Timothy 3:15, CO 52,288.

¹⁷ Comm. on Acts 1:2, COR XII/1,18,6-7; see also comm. on 1 Timothy 4:16, CO 52,304: "Nor ought they to think it strange that he ascribes to Timothy the work of saving the church; for certainly, all that is gained to God is saved, and it is by the preaching of the Gospel that we are gathered to Christ."

¹⁸ More will be said about this important point in paragraph 10.2.

¹⁹ Comm. on Acts 5:17, COR XII/1,147,20-23; for a similar description of "the horribly corrupt state of the church", see Calvin's letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,4,19-20.

²⁰ Comm. on Acts 22:3, COR XII/2,215,27-29.

²¹ Comm. on Acts 23:2, COR XII/2,230,25-26; see also comm. on Acts 23:5, COR XII/2,233,17-18.

²² Inst. 4.3.1, CO 2,776. For the combination of order and governance, see also comm. on Acts 7:2, COR XII/1,176,35 & 38; comm. on Acts 13:2, COR XII/1,365,11-14. In *Admonitio paterna*, CO 7,265-266, Calvin discusses the importance of order. See also F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody: The Church, a History of Divine Protection* [Reformed Historical Theology, volume 12] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 134-137; B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 134-135.

²³ Comm. on Acts 5:1, COR XII/1,137,26-27.

of government, he commends the prince and the Polish nobility for unanimously desiring a properly constituted church order (*Ecclesiae ordo*), and he warns them that troublemakers force their way into the church when there is disorder (*incompositus*).²⁴ It can be assumed that Calvin wanted the order that existed in the early church to serve as a model to fulfill the nobility's desire. His commentary was to aid this purpose, and it contains numerous instances of practical advice in matters of church government. A few examples, each one relating to the involvement of the people in matters of faith and church life, will suffice.

From the way that the apostles, in Acts 6, dealt with the murmuring of the Greeks by assembling the congregation in order to find a solution for the problem, Calvin concludes that the church was governed with order and reasonableness (*ordo et ratio*), so that while authority was in the hands of the apostles, they still let the people know what was in their minds.²⁵ These aspects of transparency and congregational involvement return in Calvin's comments on Acts 15:30. There he criticizes the Papacy for excluding the body of the people from the common doctrine, keeping them ignorant as if they were a herd of pigs. He considers it to be completely inconsistent with holy and Christian order. He recommends a middle position (*mediocritas*), so that the authorities may continue deciding controversies in matters of faith, while the people's liberty is nonetheless maintained.²⁶ In line with this view Calvin deems it orderly to involve the church in choosing ministers.²⁷ In fact, it is a tyrannous thing if a single individual appoints ministers by his own authority. The appropriate method is election by common votes – this is the middle way between tyranny and disorder.²⁸ Nonetheless, God should always preside as the chief Moderator of such elections.²⁹ In his commentary on Acts 14:23 Calvin says that Paul and Barnabas, rather than God, presided like moderators, but still the people had a free election. At this point Calvin refers to the Council of Laodicea (middle of the fourth century, probably around 363-365 AD), which forbid election to be left to the common people

²⁴ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,6,34-35 & 7,6-7.

²⁵ Comm. on Acts 6:2, COR XII/1,164,21-22; on the involvement of the whole church in election to office, as well as deposing from it, see comm. on Acts 1:15, COR XII/1,37,24-25 & 41,25-27.

²⁶ Comm. on Acts 15:30, COR XII/2,60,26-30 & 61,1-8; see also comm. on Acts 15:22, COR XII/2,56,10-14.

²⁷ See W.H.Th. Moehn, *God Roept Ons tot Zijn Dienst* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1996), 149-155. An English version of this text can be found in W.H.Th. Moehn, 'Mettre ordre en l'Eglise de Dieu – The Election of Officers in Calvin's Sermons on the Acts, in *Calvin Evangelii Propugnator: Calvin, Champion of the Gospel. Papers Presented at the International Congress on Calvin Research, Seoul 1998*, ed. D.F. Wright, A.N.S. Lane and J. Balserak (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2006), 137-146; B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 139-142.

²⁸ Comm. on Acts 6:3, COR XII/1,166,15-20.

²⁹ Comm. on Acts 13:2, COR XII/1,363,27-30.

(canon 13). This reference, however, does not prohibit every involvement by the people, but rather an unsupervised involvement.³⁰

Order in the governance of the church is of such importance to Calvin that it strongly influences his interpretation of the prophesying of Philip's daughters in Acts 21. He acknowledges his uncertainty of exactly how these four girls discharged their office, but what is clear to him is that the Spirit of God ruled them in such a way that he did not disturb the order that he himself has ordained. And this order includes that women were not allowed to play a public part in the church, and therefore these girls would have had to prophesy at home or in a private place.³¹ Calvin comes to the same conclusion with regards to Priscilla. Although her example shows us that women were not as unacquainted with the Word of God as the Papists wish to have them, we should still remember that Priscilla carried out her instruction of Apollos privately, so that she might not destroy the order prescribed by God and by nature.³² It is quite interesting to see how, in the case of Philip's four daughters, Calvin finds a way to show that the extraordinary gift of the Spirit, which they possessed and exercised, does not turn the Spirit against himself. The Spirit of gifts does not contradict the Spirit of order, implicating that the church with her gifts should always operate within the borders of the order provided by the Spirit. This principle notwithstanding, Calvin does leave room for extraordinary actions in times of disorder (*in rebus confusis*). Especially when the worship of God needs to be defended and those in authority block every avenue to do so while abusing the office given them by God, much has to be done that is contrary to the accepted custom.³³ This, of course, raises the question as to the extent of the authority of the offices in the church. When are the offices executed in such a way that order turns into disorder? This will be the focus of the following paragraph.

10.2. Authority

Calvin is very clear when it comes to the question about the ultimate authority in the church. In fact, as can be seen from the so-called *Argumentum*, his whole commentary on Acts is based on the premise that Luke teaches that Christ is the perpetual Governor of his church, and that

³⁰ Comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2,22,18-21.

³¹ Comm. on Acts 21:9, COR XII/2,200,6-10.

³² Comm. on Acts 18:26, COR XII/2,150,18-23.

³³ Comm. on Acts 4:1, COR XII/1,116,36 & 117,1-4; see also B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 141.

the Holy Spirit was sent for this purpose (i.e. to exercise Christ's governance – HHvA).³⁴ The book of Acts, which reviews for us the origin and progress of the church, presupposes Christ as the King of heaven and earth.³⁵ This principal is subsequently stressed throughout the commentary, very often in connection with the position of the human ministers of the church, and quite a few times it also leads to criticism of the Roman Catholic Church. Calvin is clearly looking to instill the correct relationship between Christ and his human ministers, a relationship that cannot be understood without also paying attention to the role of Word and Spirit.³⁶ All these elements together form a web of intricate lines, and Calvin does not get tired of untangling them and showing each its rightful position.³⁷

Although God chooses to use human beings, he never wants his own glory to be obscured by their ministry.³⁸ Yes, the office of a pastor is honorable and the authority of the church is great, but not to such an extent as to distract from the power of God and the headship of Christ.³⁹ If reverence is due to earthly teachers, how much more appropriate is it to throw ourselves at the feet of Christ and show ourselves docile to him when he speaks to us from his heavenly throne?⁴⁰ And how does he reign over us? Through the Gospel, which is the Lord's yoke, to which we must yield ourselves.⁴¹ Even when God makes use of the ministry of a man, the authority and the power nevertheless remain in his hands.⁴²

This principle is central in Calvin's discussion of Acts 4 and 5, the two instances where the apostles were summoned to appear before the Jewish council.⁴³ At this stage of the history of

³⁴ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,23-24; see also comm. on Acts 10:42, COR XII/1,324,12-13 & 325,1; comm. on Acts 20:28, COR XII/2,187,31; Inst. 4.3.1. For more on the reign of Christ in the church, see A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 383-389. The absolute reign of Christ, according to Ganoczy, determines Calvin's view on the church and her offices as servants, and explains his rejection of the Roman hierarchy.

³⁵ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,1-3.

³⁶ See how these lines also come together in *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,480, where Calvin speaks about faithfully observing the rule laid down by Christ, the Supreme Teacher (*a Christo optimo magistro*), and by the prophets and apostles, and not omitting anything, which the Holy Spirit has taught in Scripture. Something similar can be seen in Calvin's sermon on Acts 4:21-26, SC 8,100,17-18, where the reformer says that we should with one accord obey what Jesus teaches us by his Spirit and through his Gospel (*par son saint Esprit, que par la doctrine de son Evangile*).

³⁷ See B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 135-138.

³⁸ Comm. on Acts 14:3, COR XII/2,6,5-6; see also comm. on Acts 5:29, COR XII/1,152,27-28; comm. on Acts 21:19, COR XII/2,203,34-36 & 204,1-2; comm. on Acts 26:18, COR XII/2,279,26-27.

³⁹ Comm. on Acts 5:29, COR XII/1,152,34 & 153,1; see also *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,522, where Calvin affords to the pastors an honor that does not take away from the supreme authority of Christ (*ex summo Christi imperio*).

⁴⁰ Comm. on Acts 22:3, COR XII/2,216,4-6.

⁴¹ Sermon on Acts 4:24b-31, SC 8,107,8-11.

⁴² Comm. on Acts 9:6, COR XII/1,269,4-6; see also comm. on Acts 5:29, COR, XII/1,152,14-16; comm. on Acts 20:24, COR XII/2,184,34-35. In his sermon on Acts 7:35-37, SC 8,312,26-31, Calvin says that Christ always maintains control and power over the entire process; he is the Head of the church and our Master, whom we must hear. It is he who has the authority to teach us, for all fullness and wisdom and divinity lie in him.

⁴³ See also Calvin's sermon on Acts 5:25-32, SC 8,160,35-40 & 161,1-4, on this topic.

Acts, Calvin still deems the Jewish council to be the legal authority in the church⁴⁴, and this body therefore serves to illustrate how believers should honor the legal authority without obscuring God's glory. In both these chapters Calvin first discusses the principles for civil authority in order, subsequently, to apply it to ecclesiastical authority. He says that, what applies to princes and others who are in authority, namely that they should be obeyed only when they give God his rightful authority as the supreme King, Father and Lord, applies even more to the spiritual government of the church.⁴⁵ When magistrates, parents and masters faithfully do what God has given them to do, one would be obedient to God when you submit to these, his ministers. But governors, fathers, kings, princes or magistrates who take away God's authority and extol themselves, are mere men and nothing else. Calvin applies this to the ministers in the church by simply saying: "The same thoughts must hold true of pastors."⁴⁶ Calvin calls this the fixed limits of the authority of pastors, which they are not to overstep. And if they do, we may lawfully refuse to obey them.⁴⁷ Authority that does not submit to the supreme and sacred authority of God, is like vain smoke or fumes – it will be blown away by God and vanish.⁴⁸ And obedience offered to evil and unfaithful pastors, even though they may be exercising lawful authority in the church, is contrary to God.⁴⁹ The Jewish council is deemed by Calvin to be such an abusive authority.⁵⁰ They are clearly enemies of God, because they wish the chief honor to be reserved for themselves as the protectors of the church.⁵¹ Calvin accuses the chief priest of forgetting his responsibility towards God and the church and for abusing his power like a tyrant.⁵²

In both Acts 4 and 5 Calvin also draws a connection between the high priest (implying the whole Jewish council) and the pope. The pope, together with his bishops, is the evil and

⁴⁴ Comm. on Acts 4:19, COR XII/1,125,30-31 & 126,3; comm. on Acts 7:2, COR XII/1,176,34-37.

⁴⁵ Comm. on Acts 4:19, COR XII/1,126,14-17.

⁴⁶ Comm. on Acts 5:29, COR XII/1,152,20-32. Despite these parallels, Calvin in his commentary on Acts 23:5, also makes a distinction between civil magistrates and leaders of the church. In the case of the former the Lord wants submission to remain intact even though disorder and corruption may reign. But in the case of the latter the consciences of the godly are released from obedience when there is an unjust domination and when the doctrine of salvation is destroyed. For Calvin this serves as justification to shake off the yoke of the pope, comm. on Acts 23:5, COR XII/2,233,21-30. In his sermon on Acts 4:5-12, SC 8,87,1-2, Calvin gives Peter as an example of the kind of respect (*estime*) we are to have for those who are in authority in the church if they do not fulfill their responsibility.

⁴⁷ Comm. on Acts 4:17, COR XII/1,125,17-19: *Certis praeserim finibus continetur pastorum autoritas, ultra quos progredi illis fas non est*. On the principle of non-obedience to authorities that overstep the limits, see R.M. Britz, 'Calvin's Instruction on the Fifth Commandment', *Koers* 79/4 (2014): 1-8. doi.org/10.4102/koers.v79i4.2174.

⁴⁸ Comm. on Acts 4:19, COR XII/1,125,31-32; comm. on Acts 5:29, COR XII/1,152,26-27.

⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 4:19, COR XII/1,126,2-4.

⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 4:19, COR XII/1,125,31-32.

⁵¹ Comm. on Acts 5:30, COR XII/1,153,29-31.

⁵² Comm. on Acts 5:28, COR XII/1,151,15-17.

unfaithful pastor who thinks that he can safeguard his authority by claiming that all the sayings he utters are divine oracles.⁵³ He wishes to hide under the name of God, but in the mean time he treads the dominion of Christ under his feet and openly rises against God.⁵⁴ Against this abuse of authority, Calvin explains in Acts 11:16 what the correct order is. Here he reminds his readers of the principal distinction between God and his ministers, lest a mortal man may appropriate to himself what belongs to God. Applying this to the subject under discussion in this particular text, namely baptism, Calvin says that ministers confer the external sign of water, but Christ supplies the effect of the sign by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ And on Acts 15:28, where the apostles and elders write “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”, Calvin comments that this way of speaking is common in Scripture in that it first mentions the name of God and subordinates ministers to the second place.⁵⁶ In all of this Calvin maintains the order that he finds in Scripture.

However, as clear as Calvin is about the principal distinction between the Spirit and the ministers, as made in Acts 15:28, just as clear is he when immediately afterwards he shows the essential unity between God and his ministers. He refers to the words in Exodus 14:31, where the people are said to have believed in God and his servant Moses. This does not mean that their faith was torn apart, as if it was given partly to God, partly to a human being. Rather, when the people had God as the one and only Creator of their faith, they also put their faith in his minister, who was inseparable from him (*a quo erat inseperabilis*). The people could not believe in God in any other way than by accepting the teaching given by Moses.⁵⁷ And “when Christ says, ‘when the Spirit comes he shall judge the world’, he notes no other kind of authority than that which he exercises by the ministry of the church.”⁵⁸ For Calvin the unity between the Spirit and the ministers, and the resulting authority of the ministers, is solely situated in the teaching ministry.⁵⁹ This is the case with the apostles, the preeminent office

⁵³ Comm. on Acts 4:19, COR XII/1,126,4-5.

⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 5:29, COR XII/1,153,1-4.

⁵⁵ Comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,334,26-28 & 31-33.

⁵⁶ Comm. on Acts 15:28, COR XII/2,58,5-6.

⁵⁷ Comm. on Acts 15:28, COR XII/2,58,6-16. In his sermon on Acts 7:35-37, SC 8,311,11-13, Calvin also speaks about Moses when he says that we thwart God’s effort to teach us through men. We do not acknowledge that he employs them as his ministers and instruments (*ministres et organes*).

⁵⁸ Comm. on Acts 5:9, COR XII/1,143,15-17.

⁵⁹ Calvin stresses this repeatedly in his *Supplex exhortatio*, e.g. in CO 6,509 (*Iam, ubi iacet docendi cura, quae restat amplius ministerii species?*); CO 6,518 (*Inde saltem aluntur veri ministry, qui populum salutis doctrina pascant*); CO 6,490 (*Pastorale munus restituimus tum ad regulam apostolicam, tum ad veteris ecclesiae consuetudinem: ut quicumque ecclesiae praesunt, doceant*). In *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,391, Calvin says that, even though the administration is not yet as pure and holy as would have been preferred, at least godly pastors are

bearers at the beginning of the church, but it continues in all other offices that flow from the apostolic office.

When the first congregation has to choose a replacement for Judas, and Peter gives as prerequisite that he must be a witness of the resurrection, Calvin comments that there is no apostleship without preaching of the Gospel. And Peter, in appointing himself and his colleagues as preachers of the resurrection, puts them under the strict obligation to teach.⁶⁰ Also in Acts 6, when the apostles decide to choose deacons to look after the poor – a task Calvin otherwise considers to be holy – and to take on the preaching of the Gospel as their first task, Calvin comments that no obedience is more pleasing to God than this (i.e. the preaching of the Gospel – HHvA). He calls on ministers to frequently remind themselves of the apostles' decision to devote themselves to the office of teaching.⁶¹ In a minister of the Gospel it is an excellent virtue if he has been not only diligent and indefatigable in pursuing the task of teaching, but was even willing to die for the defense of the doctrine.⁶² Therefore, let those who are called to the office of teaching (*ad docendi munus*) not be terrified by any threats of men or by any form of authority, but let them freely execute the office laid on them by God.⁶³ Calvin says this in connection with the apostles' defense before the Jewish council in Acts 4. In a similar context in Acts 5 he says that the apostles are called to preach, and they cannot avoid the necessity of teaching without being rebels against God.⁶⁴

Many more examples could be enumerated⁶⁵, but one passage still demands to be discussed. Paul's meeting with the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20 is of particular importance to Calvin. Here he speaks about "the model of a good and faithful teacher" (*iam cum nobis exemplar probi fidiq̃ue doctoris depingat*), with Paul's own labor serving as an example. Calvin enumerates three particulars. In the first place Paul gave the disciples sound instruction, not omitting anything necessary for their salvation.⁶⁶ Calvin calls those teachers 'bad' (*perversi enim sunt magistri*) that keep their pupils at first principles. God does not instruct us by half measures in his Word, but his teaching is complete in every sense. Calvin accuses the Papacy of giving out sparks of sound doctrine, but not scattering the darkness of ignorance.⁶⁷ From

maintained to feed souls with the doctrine of salvation. See also W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 302-304.

⁶⁰ Comm. on Acts 1:21, COR XII/1,42,3-5 & 10-12.

⁶¹ Comm. on Acts 6:2, COR XII/1,165,28-30 & 166,1-3.

⁶² Comm. on Acts 15:26, COR XII/2,57,15-18.

⁶³ Comm. on Acts 4:20, COR XII/1,127,5-8.

⁶⁴ Comm. on Acts 5:32, COR XII/1,155,34-35.

⁶⁵ See e.g. Calvin's comm. on Acts 4:33, 9:22, 10:33, 11:17, 13:47, 14:20, 15:24, 16:9, 17:32, 18:9, 28:23.

⁶⁶ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,178,29-34 & 179,1.

⁶⁷ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,179,9-13 & 16-17.

servants of Christ he, therefore, demands a pure and honest profession of sound doctrine.⁶⁸ Teachers are not to use their own judgment to determine what to teach and what to omit, but to teach whatever is revealed in Scripture.⁶⁹ Secondly, Calvin calls on pastors to teach the church not only in a general way on the public platform, but also care for the individual sheep in private. And the sheep, if they want to be counted as sheep and not as bears, should allow the pastors and accept their admonishments.⁷⁰ And thirdly, the teaching of the pastors should include a call to faith and repentance, and for this they bear responsibility.⁷¹ A few verses later Calvin says that God places pastors in authority over his church on this principle, that if anything perishes by their negligence an account will be demanded from them. He accuses the Papal clergy of boasting in titles and usurping the name of pastors, but without thinking about rendering an account of the souls.⁷² From the above it is clear that human ministers only have authority in the church if they acknowledge the supreme authority of Christ, and this can only be done by faithfully preaching and teaching the Gospel. The authority of the ministers, therefore, consists in the authority of the Gospel. And, says Calvin, the authority of the Gospel collapses unless we know that the living Christ speaks to us from heaven.⁷³ The pure handling of Scripture has as its aim that Christ alone may be pre-eminent. And the state of the church will be sound when Christ is the one Master that is heard.⁷⁴ In fact, this is a guiding principle (*moderatio*) for the reformer, that God alone is heard in Christ, and only Christ himself, but speaking through his ministers.⁷⁵

The same applies when Calvin speaks about synods and councils. We cannot boast in them, as the Papists do, as if any decision by men is to be regarded as heavenly oracles. The purpose of these ecclesial meetings is to put an end to controversies in accordance with the will of God. The best councils are, therefore, characterized by the fact that they are subject to the Word of the Lord.⁷⁶ Calvin says this in his commentary on Acts 15. The meeting described in this chapter provides for him the living image of a proper council, where the truth of God puts an end to all controversies and where the Spirit presides.⁷⁷

⁶⁸ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,179,28-29.

⁶⁹ Comm. on Acts 20:26, COR XII/2,185,20-21 & 25-26.

⁷⁰ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,180,4-5 & 11-15.

⁷¹ Comm. on Acts 20:21, COR XII/2,180,18-20.

⁷² Comm. on Acts 20:26, COR XII/2,186,12-14 & 17-21.

⁷³ Comm. on Acts 1:3, COR XII/1,19,7-8.

⁷⁴ Comm. on Acts 20:30, COR XII/2,190,26-27 & 32-33.

⁷⁵ Comm. on Acts 9:6, COR XII/1,270,1-2.

⁷⁶ Comm. on Acts 15:2, COR XII/2,31,24-36.

⁷⁷ Comm. on Acts 15:12, COR XII/2,46,24-27.

Calvin unfailingly recommends the human ministry of the Word.⁷⁸ It has pleased God to use our agency for maintaining the government of the church.⁷⁹ He urges his readers not to wage war on God like the giants, but to learn and listen to the ministers by whose lips God teaches us.⁸⁰ This is the reason why the Lord sent Philip, rather than an angel, to the eunuch, for not only is Scripture given to us, but also interpreters and teachers to help us. Calvin deems it an extraordinary recommendation of outward preaching, that the voice of God sounds on the lips of men while the angels keep silent.⁸¹ Interestingly, Calvin's reference to the angel is not an isolated one.⁸² In his commentary on three consecutive chapters of Acts (chapters 8-10) he discusses the respective roles of angels and humans in preaching God's Word. Why does the angel not rather fulfill the role of teacher? Would not an oracle from an angel have greater authority than the preaching of the Gospel from human lips?⁸³ But Calvin calls it disgraceful ingratitude when men cannot bear to hear God speaking through human lips, and rather want angels to fly to them and God's glory to be revealed directly from heaven.⁸⁴ For God has chosen to be heard by the voice of men. Just as Christ in Acts 9 showed himself to Paul in a vision but left the responsibility of teaching to Ananias, thereby confirming the ministry of preaching the Gospel, so the angel in Acts 10 gives way to Peter to carry out the task of preaching.⁸⁵

10.3. Designations

Calvin's view on the fundamental nature of the relationship between God and the human office bearers, as described above, is reflected and confirmed in the different designations he uses

⁷⁸ C.L. Elwood, 'Calvin's Ecclesial Theology and Human Salvation', in *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society, 1509-2009*, ed. M.E. Hirzel and M. Sallmann (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 93-94.

⁷⁹ Comm. on Acts 1:21, COR XII/1,41,22-23.

⁸⁰ Comm. on Acts 7:51, COR XII/1,219,33-35.

⁸¹ Comm. on Acts 8:31, COR XII/1,255,9-12 & 14-16, although Calvin adds at the same time that, if we show ourselves to be teachable, the Lord will send angels from heaven to teach us rather than let us labor in vain, see comm. on Acts 8:31, COR XII/1,255,1-2. Interestingly, Chrysostom does not make the distinction between humans and angels, but rather calls the human preachers 'angels of light, ministers of things above' (*hinc palam est eos fuisse angelos lucis, et supernarum rerum ministros*), see *hom.* 4, PG 60,45.

⁸² See also Calvin's sermon on Acts 7:37-38, SC 8,322,1-14, where he discusses the fact that God speaks through mortal men. God wants to put our humility and our hope to the test by sending us his Word through men. Could he not manifest himself to us from heaven or send angels to instruct us? According to Calvin there is a rationale behind the fact that God chose men to bring his Word. When God speaks to us through men, he tests our reverence.

⁸³ Comm. on Acts 10:5, COR XII/1,299,16-19.

⁸⁴ Comm. on Acts 9:6, COR XII/1,269,22-25.

⁸⁵ Comm. on Acts 10:5, COR XII/1,299,19-23.

for the human agents. Almost all of these names indicate that the human agents are in God's hand, ready to obey him and serve man, by proclaiming truthfully the message given to them.

Calvin, for example, calls the apostles 'ambassadors' (*legati*).⁸⁶ Just as it is customary to provide ambassadors with instructions so that they won't exceed the intention of the one who has sent them, so the apostles are commanded to preach the Gospel. They, therefore, did not utter their own inventions (*non protulisse sua commenta*), but faithfully conveyed what was enjoined them by their heavenly Master. After all, in the preaching of the Gospel there is nothing which derives from man, but it is a divine ordinance of the Spirit to which the whole world must subject.⁸⁷ In his sermon on these same verses Calvin considers it a crime of lese-majesty when an ambassador does not implement his mandate.⁸⁸ In his tract *Supplex exhortatio* Calvin states that Christ gave his apostles an authority similar to those which the prophets received, an authority exactly defined, namely to act as ambassadors to men. In defining this task he says that he who is entrusted with an embassy must faithfully and religiously conform to his instructions.⁸⁹ When Paul, in Acts 13:32, says that he and his co-workers have come to bring good tidings of the promise made to the fathers, Calvin interestingly remarks that now (*iam*) Paul assumes the task and office of an apostle in order that he may be heard as a lawful minister of God. The reformer then paraphrases the apostle's words as saying that the sum of the embassy (*legatio*) imposed on him is that what God had promised long ago is now being revealed.⁹⁰ The legality of Paul's ministerial office is clearly tied to the fulfillment of his embassy.

Another image, one that Calvin uses in his commentary on Acts 17:31 and closely resembling that of an ambassador, is that of heralds or court officials of the supreme Judge (*praecones sunt summi Iudicis vel apparitores*) – they are to bring the guilty to defend themselves and announce the punishment. Those who fulfill this assignment are, according to Calvin, the only

⁸⁶ See also serm. on Acts 7:37-38, SC 8,322,32-33 & 323,6-7. For the role of ambassadors in sixteenth century Europe, see P.M. Dover and H. Scott, 'The Emergence of Diplomacy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350-1750, Volume II: Cultures and Power*, ed. H. Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 663-695. See for example what the authors write on page 674: "During the sixteenth century, the role of a diplomat was distilled down to three broad areas of operation: representing and embodying his sovereign... As representatives, diplomats were projections of their sovereign, the embodiment of the prince's person and power."

⁸⁷ Comm. on Acts 1:2, COR XII/2, 18,6-9 & 20-21 & 28-30.

⁸⁸ Serm. on Acts 1:1-2, SC 8,6,30-31.

⁸⁹ *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,471; see also Calvin's sermon on Acts 5:25-32, SC 8,159,24-29, where he says that the calling to the office of preaching does not give us the license to say what seems good to us, but to fulfill faithfully our God-given charge.

⁹⁰ Comm. on Acts 13:32, COR XII/1,386,18-21.

proper teachers of the Gospel.⁹¹ In light of his positive use of this image, Calvin can assert that if the pope wants to be heard as the ambassador of Christ (*Christi legatus*), he needs to speak with the words of Christ.⁹² The apostles, and after them all other office bearers, are ambassadors of Christ, only allowed to speak what he teaches them.

Shortly after spelling out to the pope what he needs to do if he wants to be called an ambassador of Christ, Calvin uses another poignant image. He calls the faithful pastor an instrument of God (*Dei organum*), one who orders or forbids from the Word of God.⁹³ When commenting on the Lord's words to Ananias in Acts 9:15 he defines this designation, saying that the word 'instrument' shows that men can do nothing in so far as God uses their labor according to his will. "For if we are instruments he is strictly the only Actor (*author*): the power and the capability of acting are in his hands."⁹⁴ The apostles consider themselves instruments of the Holy Spirit, whereby it is demonstrated that the Gospel is not a man-inspired phenomenon. It is not a teaching open to doubt, it is God's infallible truth.⁹⁵

But, to be sure, the Lord really does act through these instruments – he does not send them to work so that they may be dead instruments (*ut mortua sint organa*), or as if they were play-actors (*quasi fabulae actores*), but so that he may work powerfully with their assistance.⁹⁶ It is this reality that leads Calvin to repeat regularly that ministers do not uselessly beat the air with their words, or a similar expression.⁹⁷ He calls on his readers to connect their faith to the external voice of men, which Christ uses as an instrument.⁹⁸

A similar connotation can be found in a third designation Calvin uses: servants (*servi*).⁹⁹ Servants of the Gospel are wholly devoted to obedience to Christ¹⁰⁰ and serve men without

⁹¹ Comm. on Acts 17:31, COR XII/2,130,26-28.

⁹² Comm. on Acts 5:28, COR XII/1,151,21-23.

⁹³ Comm. on Acts 5:29, COR XII/1,152,17-20; comm. on Isaiah 7:13, CO 36,153. See also B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 102-103 & 137-138.

⁹⁴ Comm. on Acts 9:15, COR XII/1,273,34 & 274,1-3.

⁹⁵ Sermon on Acts 5:30-32, SC 8,177,17-19.

⁹⁶ Comm. on Acts 26:18, COR XII/2,279,18-19. This has relevance for Calvin's view on the inspiration of Scripture, which according to both Neuser and Opitz, is not a verbal inspiration, but rather a personal inspiration; see W.H. Neuser, 'Calvin's Verständnis der Heiligen Schrift', in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor, Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*, ed. W.H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 56-66; P. Opitz, 'Scripture', in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 242. This view on inspiration takes on extra significance when it is kept in mind that *organum* often refers to a musical instrument, thereby showing the different instruments God uses, yet all of them sounding the one message of the heavenly music (see chapter 11 of this study).

⁹⁷ See e.g. comm. on Acts 26:18, COR XII/2,279,22-23; comm. on Acts 2:2, COR XII/1,49,13-14.

⁹⁸ Comm. on Acts 10:5, COR XII/1,299,24-26.

⁹⁹ See B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 135-138; A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 178-180.

¹⁰⁰ Comm. on Acts 22:18, COR XII/2,224,31-33.

any view on material gain.¹⁰¹ Servants have to struggle against all sorts of obstacles and not give way to difficulties, even when their labors do not appear to render results.¹⁰² They should stand firm against the intolerable vices of ambition and vanity¹⁰³, not wanting to receive rewards for their services as mercenaries do.¹⁰⁴ They should not be moved according to the changes of the times, but remain self-consistent and always keep a straight course, which is the course of preaching the Gospel.¹⁰⁵ They should be prepared for insults and misrepresentations, but in the mean time make sure that their consciences are clear before God and equip themselves for a proper defense when given the opportunity.¹⁰⁶

10.3.1. Ministers

The common thread in all these different designations, is reflected in the one designation Calvin uses most frequently in his commentary on Acts, namely that of the minister (*minister*) and the work of ministry (*ministerium*). B.C. Milner summarizes the content of this designation well when he says: “To be the minister of the Word means, as the word *minister* itself denotes, not to be the lordly dispenser of it, but its obedient servant. To be the minister of truth means to be in subjection to the truth.”¹⁰⁷ In this regard it is worth noting Erasmus’ use of the word *dispensatores* – we are not authors of evangelical doctrine, but merely dispensers or stewards.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the only ministers are those who show themselves obedient to the Lord, while the real Author is he who uses their hands and activities.¹⁰⁹ Or to put it in another way: the glory should be ascribed to God as the only Author, while man is put in his proper place as a minister.¹¹⁰

In Stephen’s speech in Acts 7 Calvin uses Stephen’s reference to Moses as redeemer (*redemptor*) to speak elaborately on this issue. Though Moses is called redeemer of the people, it is in no other sense than that he was a minister of God, while the glory of the deliverance remained completely in God’s hands. We should learn from this, says Calvin, that as often as

¹⁰¹ Comm. on Acts 8:39, COR XII/1,262,29-30.

¹⁰² Comm. on Acts 16:12, COR XII/2,75,5-6; comm. on Acts 20:3, COR XII/2,172,23-24.

¹⁰³ Comm. on Acts 20:18, COR XII/2,177,21-22.

¹⁰⁴ Comm. on Acts 8:39, COR XII/1,262,28-30 & 32-33.

¹⁰⁵ Comm. on Acts 20:19, COR XII/2,178,27-28.

¹⁰⁶ Comm. on Acts 25:7, COR XII/2,264,15-20.

¹⁰⁷ B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 136; see also Calvin’s description in his sermon on Acts 6:1-3, SC 8,197,25 & 198,1-4.

¹⁰⁸ LB VII, 748C.

¹⁰⁹ Comm. on Acts 14:3, COR XII/2,6,2-4.

¹¹⁰ Comm. on Acts 19:11, COR XII/2,159,20-21.

men are honored with God's titles, God is not stripped of his own honor. God is the chief moderator in accomplishing salvation for his church. He uses men as his ministers in such a way that the power and the accomplishment depend on him alone.¹¹¹ Throughout his commentary Calvin stresses this point, namely that the effect of the labor of human ministers always comes from God, whether it be in preaching the Gospel or in administering the sacraments. In his commentary on Acts 11:16 Calvin even deems this to be the distinctive difference between Christ and the ministers of the church: ministers certainly confer the external sign of water, but Christ is responsible for and fulfills the effect of the sign by the power of his Spirit.¹¹² And even though Scripture gives honor and praise to the outward ministry (*externum ministerium*), it must not be separated from the Spirit, who gives life to it just as the soul quickens the body.¹¹³ It is, therefore, not surprising that Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 regularly make their appearance in Calvin's discussion of the ministry of men: ministers achieve nothing by planting and watering unless God gives effect to their work by the power of his Spirit.¹¹⁴

It is clear from the above that, in their ministry, men stand in God's service – for Calvin, therefore, men are always ministers of God¹¹⁵, of Christ¹¹⁶, or of the Holy Spirit¹¹⁷. And they administer what belongs to the triune God¹¹⁸, making them ministers of the Word¹¹⁹, of salvation¹²⁰, of deliverance¹²¹, of eternal life (despite the fact that they possess nothing but the stuff of death).¹²² When Paul, in Acts 28:8, prays before healing Publius' father, Calvin

¹¹¹ Comm. on Acts 7:35, COR XII/1,201,18-21 & 27-29; see also comm. on Acts 21:19, COR XII/2,203,33-35. In his comm. on Acts 10:25, COR XII/1,310,25-27 Calvin warns of giving honor, which has the appearance of divine worship, to the ministers of Christ.

¹¹² Comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,334,31-33.

¹¹³ Comm. on Acts 26:18, COR XII/2,279,28-30; for the work of the Spirit through ministers, see also Calvin's comm. on Acts 11:21, COR XII/1,340,16-17.

¹¹⁴ See e.g. comm. on Acts 2:47, COR XII/1,92,29-30; comm. on Acts 6:4, COR XII/1,167,17-19; comm. on Acts 11:21, COR XII/1,340,10-13; comm. on Acts 26:18, COR XII/2,279,21 & 30-32.

¹¹⁵ See e.g. comm. on Acts 8:18, COR XII/1,244,29; comm. on Acts 11:21, COR XII/1,340,10.

¹¹⁶ See e.g. comm. on Acts 5:36, COR XII/1,160,1; comm. on Acts 9:6, COR XII/1,269,16-17.

¹¹⁷ Comm. on Acts 15:28, COR XII/2,58,1-6.

¹¹⁸ See Calvin's reference to the Trinity in the context of the ministry, in his comm. on Acts 26:18, COR XII/2,279,12-15, where he says: "Paul seems to be putting himself on too high a level in arrogating to himself what properly belongs to God. For we know that only the Holy Spirit enlightens the eyes of the mind. We know that Christ is the one and only Liberator, who snatches us out the tyranny of Satan. We know that it is God alone, who ... admits us into the lot of the saints. But it is a common thing for God to transfer to his ministers the honor due to himself alone..."

¹¹⁹ See e.g. comm. on Acts 19:29, COR XII/2,168,28; comm. on Acts 20:33, COR XII/2,194,13-14; comm. on Acts 27:33, COR XII/2,298,9-10.

¹²⁰ Comm. on Acts 27:23, COR XII/2,294,31-32.

¹²¹ Comm. on Acts 27:30, COR XII/2,296,27.

¹²² See e.g. comm. on Acts 11:14, COR XII/1,334,15-18; comm. on Acts 26:17, COR XII/2,278,31; comm. on Acts 27:42, COR XII/2,299,29.

comments that Paul is hereby showing that he is not the one responsible for the miracle, but only the minister, so that God may not be defrauded of his glory.¹²³

However, Calvin does make an important distinction. In his commentary on Acts 7, when Stephen says that Moses was in the wilderness with both the angel and the fathers, Calvin shows that Moses had a different relationship to each – for the fathers he was their leader, appointed by God, but in relationship to the angel he was a minister.¹²⁴ This double relationship also appears in Calvin’s commentary in Acts 9. In relation to the church Calvin shows the honor of the ministry – if Paul was subjected to the instruction of a common disciple, Ananias, who are we to be reluctant to hear the ministers of Christ?¹²⁵ But in relation to God the ministry of man never takes away the authority and power from God’s hands, and it should always be Christ alone speaking through his ministers.¹²⁶ This distinction allows the reformer to regularly remind his readers of the honor of the ministry¹²⁷, showing that many things that Scripture ascribes to Christ also apply to his ministers¹²⁸, and even calling godly ministers helpers and liberators of those who are perishing¹²⁹, while at the same time reminding the ministers that they are exactly what their designation says, and nothing more.

10.3.2. Pastors and teachers

Based on Ephesians 4:11 Calvin identifies five offices: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.¹³⁰ However, in his commentary on Acts he very often uses the last two – pastors and teachers – not so much to indicate a specific office (or offices), but rather to describe the common task of several different offices. To be true, there are a few instances where pastors and teachers are defined as specific offices and demarcated from other offices, but in general Calvin uses the terms ‘pastors’ and ‘teachers’ in a broad and non-specific sense. In this way he can refer to the apostles as being pastors¹³¹ and teachers¹³², but similarly he can apply these

¹²³ Comm. on Acts 28:8, COR XII/2,305,6-8.

¹²⁴ Comm. on Acts 7:38, COR XII/1,203,23-26.

¹²⁵ Comm. on Acts 9:6, COR XII/1,269,14-18; see also comm. on Acts 10:5, COR XII/1,299,29-31; comm. on Acts 22:10, COR XII/2,218,30-34.

¹²⁶ Comm. on Acts 9:6, COR XII/1,269,4-6 & 270,1-3.

¹²⁷ Comm. on Acts 26:18, COR XII/2,279,28-30.

¹²⁸ Comm. on Acts 13:47, COR XII/1,403,9-10 & 16-17.

¹²⁹ See e.g. comm. on Acts 16:9, COR XII/2,73,11-14 & 17-18.

¹³⁰ See S.J. Botha, ‘Calvin’s Preaching on the Church in the Letter to the Ephesians’, 119-123; K. Runia, ‘Calvijn’s Visie op de Ambten’, 105-107.

¹³¹ See e.g. comm. on Acts 8:1, COR XII/1,231,29-30.

¹³² See e.g. comm. on Acts 9:26, COR XII/1,281,1-2, where Paul is called the principal teacher of the church (*ut praecipuus sit Ecclesiae Doctor usque ad finem mundi*). See also comm. on Acts 15:7, COR XII/2,34,21, where

designations to other offices.¹³³ S.J. Botha's clear statement that "it is evident that Calvin understood pastors to refer to ministers of the church and teachers to lecturers in theology"¹³⁴ does not seem to hold true for his commentary on the book of Acts. This is the reason for discussing these designations here, rather than in paragraph 10.4 where the specific offices will be discussed.

It is the duty of the good pastor (*bonus pastor*) to defend the sheep against wolves.¹³⁵ He has to stick to his post when wolves attack the sheepfold – this is part of Calvin's justification for the fact that the apostles initially did not go out to proclaim the Gospel as Christ had commanded them, but rather stayed in Jerusalem. This leads him to a discussion of the right of pastors to flee during persecution, a right that he, just like Augustine before him, only permits when the pastor is the only one being persecuted and when there is no danger of the church being scattered because of the pastor's absence.¹³⁶ This discussion illustrates the point made earlier, that the designation of 'pastor' is initially applied to the apostles, after which it is given a general application.

Something similar can be seen in his commentary on Acts 14:20, where the reformer reflects on Paul and Barnabas' return to the churches they first established in order to confirm them in the faith by warning, exhorting and convicting them. This leads him to a general application, saying that Christ not only commands his ministers to teach but also to exhort, before drawing the conclusion (*quare*) that pastors should not think that they have fulfilled their ministry when they have given people the right knowledge, unless they also fulfill the task of exhorting.¹³⁷ Calvin seamlessly moves from the apostles to the ministers and subsequently to the pastors, without explicating to whom he is specifically referring. Also in the commentary on Acts 20:20 Paul's recounting of his pastoral practice in Ephesus brings Calvin to the general application

all those gathered together in Jerusalem, apostles and elders alike, are called public teachers of the church (*publici Ecclesiae doctores*).

¹³³ See e.g. comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2,22,1-5, where Calvin's Latin Bible text speaks about the appointment of *presbyteri*, but where he comments that Paul and Barnabas assigned pastors (*pastores*) to the individual churches. Immediately afterwards he comments that he understands *presbyteri* as those on whom the office of teaching had been enjoined. Thus, the *presbyteri* are called both pastors and teachers.

¹³⁴ S.J. Botha, 'Calvin's Preaching on the Church in the Letter to the Ephesians', 122.

¹³⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:40, COR XII/1,86,18-19; comm. on Acts 8:1, COR XII/1,231,29-30 & 232,17-19; comm. on Acts 20:28, COR XII/2,187,10-20. Calvin often uses the designation of the pastor in a literal sense, denoting the shepherd whose task it is to take care of the sheepfold and protect it against the attacks of wolves. See also comm. on Acts 8:3, COR XII/1,234,13-15 and comm. on Acts 9:5, COR XII/1,268,4-5, where Calvin makes his readers aware of the goodness of God who turned the cruel wolf, Saul, not only into a sheep but also into a shepherd. For more on the task of the pastors, see A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 249-310.

¹³⁶ Comm. on Acts 8:1, COR XII/1,232,17-32.

¹³⁷ Comm. on Acts 14:20, COR XII/2,19,19-25.

of the importance of the pastor's care for the individual sheep. The pastor has the task of bringing back the wandering and scattered to the fold, binding up those who are broken and crippled, healing the sick, and supporting the frail and the weak.¹³⁸

There is, however, one instance where Calvin does make some distinction and uses the term 'pastors' in a more specific sense, although not indicating exactly which office he has in mind. In his commentary on Acts 14:23 he says that Christ not only sent apostles to spread the Gospel, but also commanded pastors to be appointed so that the proclamation of the Gospel might be a daily practice. Here the term 'pastors' refers to, what Calvin calls, the ordinary ministry (*ordinarium ministerium*). Whereas the apostles did not have a definite station, the pastors were appointed to individual churches.¹³⁹ All of this underlines the fluidity of Calvin's application of this term.

What is clear, however, is that pastors, whether they be apostles, ministers or presbyters, are people with authority over the church, an authority they exercise by teaching the people the doctrine of Christ.¹⁴⁰ Being a shepherd over the sheep means proclaiming God's Word, being ready to instruct, to teach, to reprove, to exhort, and to censure both in public and in private.¹⁴¹ Shepherds are to devote their care to the church of God over which they rule, and are therefore bound to the flock.¹⁴² They are to show the way of salvation, and if anyone goes astray by their negligence, they will be held accountable for it.¹⁴³ On the other hand, if a faithful pastor orders or forbids from the Word of God, it is God speaking through him.¹⁴⁴ The sheep are exhorted, not only to hear the pastor's voice in public, but also to admit these pastors into their homes and accept their private warnings.¹⁴⁵ The rule of the pastor is therefore always the rule of the Word of God. In this regard, and in order to keep the people in the pure doctrine of the Gospel, Calvin feels duty-bound to "often show and testify" (*ostendere et subinde testificari*) how much Papistry differs from Christianity.¹⁴⁶ They usurp the name of pastors, but in the mean

¹³⁸ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,180,3-6.

¹³⁹ Comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2,21,29-31; see also comm. on Acts 18:22, COR XII/2,147,20, as well as Inst. 4.3.6-7.

¹⁴⁰ Comm. on Acts 5:29, COR XII/1,152,15-19; comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2,22,10; comm. on Acts 20:27, COR XII/2,186,12-13; comm. on Acts 20:28, COR XII/2,187,5-6; comm. on Acts 21:22, COR XII/2,206,17-18. See also Inst. 4.3.6.

¹⁴¹ Sermon on Acts 7:23-31, SC 8,293,5-10.

¹⁴² Comm. on Acts 20:28, COR XII/2,187,18-20.

¹⁴³ Comm. on Acts 20:27, COR XII/2,186,13-15.

¹⁴⁴ Comm. on Acts 5:29, COR XII/2,152,17-19.

¹⁴⁵ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,180,11-16.

¹⁴⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:40, COR XII/1,86,19-22.

time they devour the sheep and do not think about rendering an account of so many perishing souls.¹⁴⁷

With regards to teachers, it seems that, for Calvin, the apostle Paul is the most prominent human teacher in the book of Acts.¹⁴⁸ He calls him “the principal teacher of the church right to the end of the world” (*praecipuus sit Ecclesiae Doctor usque ad finem mundi*)¹⁴⁹, “the teacher of the Gentiles” (*Gentium doctor*) whose calling was the key by which God has opened the kingdom of heaven to us¹⁵⁰, and a (at that time still future) “teacher of the whole church” (*totius Ecclesiae doctor*).¹⁵¹ Even in front of Agrippa and his sister, Paul is not merely a defendant, but Calvin puts him in the role of teacher, giving luster to the name of Christ.¹⁵² It is also Paul who portrays for us (*cum nobis*) the model of a good and faithful teacher¹⁵³, and who prescribes a principle for the office of teaching.¹⁵⁴

What then are the characteristics of a good and faithful teacher? It is someone who has the edification of the church in his sight and uses Scripture as the only norm for the method of teaching.¹⁵⁵ He should not determine what to teach and what to omit, but leave this decision to God, and should teach whatever is revealed in Scripture.¹⁵⁶ In his commentary on Acts 28:23 Calvin calls on anyone who wishes to teach others not to produce anything except from the pure fountain of Scripture.¹⁵⁷ The proper office of a teacher is not to produce something novel, but to adapt Scripture to the people’s needs. Calvin can even say that the teacher is not so much teaching, as accommodating teaching that has been taken from another source, Scripture, for the edification of the church.¹⁵⁸ And furthermore, the Lord does not teach us with half measures in his Word, but teaches wisdom that is perfect and complete. Therefore, teachers who keep their pupils at first principles are bad teachers.¹⁵⁹

¹⁴⁷ Comm. on Acts 20:27, COR XII/2,186,17-21.

¹⁴⁸ For more on the office of teachers, see A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 310-315; for Calvin’s view on Paul’s preaching in Acts, see S. Scheld, ‘Die missionarische Verkündigung des Paulus in Calvins Kommentar der Apostelgeschichte’, in *Creatio ex amore. Beiträge zu einer Theologie der Liebe*, ed. T. Franke, M. Knapp, J. Schmid (Würzburg: Echter, 1989), 312-328.

¹⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 9:27, COR XII/1,281,1-2.

¹⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,10-11; see also comm. on Acts 13:2, COR XII/1,364,24-31, where Calvin confirms that Paul and Barnabas had already been in the order of teachers for some time, but that only now the extraordinary task of making known the grace of God to the Gentiles had been laid upon them.

¹⁵¹ Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,221,23-24.

¹⁵² Comm. on Acts 25:23, COR XII/2,271,23-24.

¹⁵³ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,178,34 & 179,1.

¹⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 20:26, COR XII/2,185,16-17.

¹⁵⁵ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,179,2-5.

¹⁵⁶ Comm. on Acts 20:26, COR XII/2,185,19-26.

¹⁵⁷ Comm. on Acts 28:23, COR XII/2,312,4-5.

¹⁵⁸ Comm. on Acts 13:15, COR XII/1,374,30-34.

¹⁵⁹ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,179,9-13.

Calvin exhorts teachers to be pious¹⁶⁰, not giving any verbal instructions if they have not actually carried them out themselves.¹⁶¹ They are not to boast or desire superiority¹⁶², but voluntarily humble themselves and be fellow-disciples (*condiscipulus*) along with others.¹⁶³ They should be even more inflamed than others to preserve the church in chastity¹⁶⁴, endowed with zeal when they see the worship of God being polluted.¹⁶⁵ And if they teach faithfully, they should be prepared to come into conflict with those who despise God, as Calvin learns from the history of Stephen.¹⁶⁶ He therefore encourages all godly teachers to keep doing their duty.¹⁶⁷

10.4. Different offices

Apart from the different designations, which support and clarify Calvin's view on the *nature* of the office, Calvin also discusses different *kinds* of offices. His discussion of the different kinds of offices can be traced back to several strands of his thought, among which are his use of Ephesians 4:11, his distinction between temporary and permanent offices, and his focus on certain gifts for arriving at particular offices.¹⁶⁸ As has already been stated, Calvin identifies five offices based on Ephesians 4:11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Within these five he distinguishes between temporary offices (apostles, prophets and evangelists) and permanent offices (pastors and teachers).¹⁶⁹ It is not surprising that the three temporary offices are all present in Calvin's commentary on Acts. After all, the book of Acts deals with the exact period when the temporary offices were still fully functional. These offices were, in Calvin's view, special provisions for this initial period of the church.¹⁷⁰ Of these three the office of apostle plays a central role.

¹⁶⁰ Comm. on Acts 10:2, COR XII/1,295,14-17; see also comm. on Acts 13:10, COR XII/1,371,5-6.

¹⁶¹ Comm. on Acts 20:18, COR XII/2,177,18-20.

¹⁶² Comm. on Acts 10:24, COR XII/1,309,31-33.

¹⁶³ Comm. on Acts 9:26, COR XII/1,281,2-3; see also comm. on Acts 22:18, COR XII/2,224,31-33.

¹⁶⁴ Comm. on Acts 17:16, COR XII/2,109,11-13.

¹⁶⁵ Comm. on Acts 14:14, COR XII/2,11,15-17.

¹⁶⁶ Comm. on Acts 7:54, COR XII/1,222,24-26.

¹⁶⁷ Comm. on Acts 26:17, COR XII/2,279,8-10.

¹⁶⁸ See e.g. K. Runia, 'Calvijns Visie op de Ambten', 99 & 106; B.G. Armstrong, 'The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Teaching on the Ministry', 100; S.J. Botha, 'Calvin's Preaching on the Church in the Letter to the Ephesians', 119-120.

¹⁶⁹ See S.J. Botha, 'Calvin's Preaching on the Church in the Letter to the Ephesians', 119-123; K. Runia, 'Calvijns Visie op de Ambten', 105-107.

¹⁷⁰ Comm. on Ephesians 4:11; see also B.G. Armstrong, 'The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Teaching on the Ministry', 99-100.

10.4.1. Apostles

Before the resurrection of Christ the disciples did not have a regular office (*ordinarium munus*), but like heralds they roused their own people to listen to Christ. Only after Christ's resurrection were they made apostles who published the doctrine committed to them throughout the whole world.¹⁷¹ For Calvin this last aspect is what sets the apostolic office apart from the other offices: there were no boundaries set to them, but the whole world was given to them to establish the kingdom and bring people to obedience to Christ.¹⁷² When Paul and Barnabas appoint presbyters in every church (*per singulas ecclesias*), Calvin comments that a distinction is drawn between the office of the presbyters and that of the apostles.

For the apostles did not have a definite station anywhere, but they moved about here and there, continually founding new churches. On the other hand pastors were appointed individually to their own churches...¹⁷³

Since the apostles did not have a fixed station at Jerusalem, but used to travel continually hither and thither, wherever occasion called them, the church there had its own presbyters, to whom the ordinary government of the church had been committed. But I have explained elsewhere how the one office differs from the other.¹⁷⁴

However, the question arises why, when the believers were scattered in Acts 8, the apostles remained in Jerusalem. After all, they had the command to spread the Gospel throughout the world. Calvin answers this question extensively. First he says that Christ had commanded the apostles to begin their work from Jerusalem (see Acts 1:8 – HHvA), and therefore they stayed there until they knew for certain that Christ, their Guide, was leading them elsewhere. In mitigation he adds that the apostles did not shy away from the task laid upon them, but that they were still bewildered by the newness and unfamiliarity of it.¹⁷⁵ He even deems it proof of their steadfastness that they remained in Jerusalem while all the rest had fled. If the apostles would have fled as well, it might have had the effect of breaking everybody's spirit.¹⁷⁶ And to

¹⁷¹ Comm. on Acts 1:4, COR XII/1,20,22-25.

¹⁷² Inst. 4.3.4; see also comm. on Acts 14:1, COR XII/2,3,15-17; comm. on Ephesians 4:11; comm. on 1 Corinthians 12:28. A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans*, 208-209, discusses this as one of the three characteristics of the apostolic service, the other two being the newness and the uniqueness of the apostolic service.

¹⁷³ Comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2,22,6-10; see also the last sentence of Inst. 4.3.6.

¹⁷⁴ Comm. on Acts 15:4, COR XII/2,32,27-28 & 33,1-3; the last sentence of this citation possibly refers to his explanation in his commentary on Acts 14:23.

¹⁷⁵ Comm. on Acts 8:1, COR XII/1,231,30-34 & 232,1-4.

¹⁷⁶ Comm. on Acts 8:1, COR XII/1,232,10-11 & 27-28; in COR XII/1,232,16-32 Calvin discusses the right of pastors to flee during times of persecution.

the objection that the apostles could have divided and apportioned provinces among themselves, he replies that Jerusalem at that stage provided work enough for them all.¹⁷⁷ It is clear from the above that Calvin anticipates some criticism towards the apostles for staying in Jerusalem, but he takes into account the fact that the church and the apostles were in a transitional period and still getting used to the novelty of the situation. At this early stage of the history of the church he does not yet strictly apply what he deems to be characteristic of the apostolic office. Later, in Acts 21:19, Calvin draws the conclusion that, at that particular time, the apostles had gone to different regions for the sake of spreading the Gospel, as their office required. For the Lord had not assigned them to Jerusalem, but rather to start from that city, and from there to go to Judea and other parts of the world.¹⁷⁸

Apart from the difference in geographical work field, Calvin also establishes a difference in responsibilities and honor between the apostles and the other offices. In his commentary on Acts 11:22 he says that the apostles were, at that time, carrying the whole burden of the kingdom of Christ. It was their responsibility to form churches everywhere, to keep all believers in the unity of faith, and to establish ministers and pastors when there was any number of believers.¹⁷⁹ All of this gave the apostles a position of honor above the other offices. Calvin speaks of a dignity of order (*dignitas ordinis*), with Christ placing the apostles before the other teachers of the church.¹⁸⁰ This is one of the reasons, although not the primary reason, why the Lord appoints Peter and John to confer the Spirit on the Samaritans, while he could have completed the work through Philip – the Lord wanted to honor the apostles with this privilege.¹⁸¹ And this is also the reason why the presbyters of Ephesus were not annoyed with Paul, the apostle of Christ and distinguished by remarkable gifts, when he summoned them to Miletus.¹⁸²

In his commentary on Acts 1:15 Calvin makes the interesting remark that, despite Judas perishing as he deserved, the order of the apostles continued unbroken (*apostolorum tamen ordo integer mansit*).¹⁸³ Calvin makes this remark in the context of discussing the election of

¹⁷⁷ Comm. on Acts 8:1, COR XII/1,232,10-14.

¹⁷⁸ Comm. on Acts 21:19, COR XII/2,4-8.

¹⁷⁹ Comm. on Acts 11:22, COR XII/1,340,33-34 & 341,1-2.

¹⁸⁰ Comm. on Acts 15:13, COR XII/2,48,1-2; see also Calvin's comm. on Acts 21:7, COR XII/2,199,11-15.

¹⁸¹ Comm. on Acts 8:14, COR XII/1,241,2-4.

¹⁸² Comm. on Acts 20:16 COR XII/2,177,10-12.

¹⁸³ Comm. on Acts 1:15, COR XII/1,37,12-13. In his *Interim adultero-germanum* Calvin deals extensively with the issue of apostolic succession. If the church does need apostolic succession, something Calvin is not convinced of, then let successors be found among those who have faithfully handed down the apostolic doctrine to posterity. He denies the title of successors of the apostles to those who have abandoned their faith and doctrine (CO 7,611). He considers the chasm between the Papacy and the apostles too deep to afford the former the right of succession

Matthias in the place of Judas. He says that Christ chose twelve to be the premier heralds of his Gospel, and that this was a sacred number. Had it been diminished, the preaching of the Gospel would have had less authority as being defective in its origins.¹⁸⁴ This is different from Thomas de Vio Cajetan's understanding. For him Judas' place has been left desolate, and there were no successors to Judas, for he did not die in the peace of Christ.¹⁸⁵ For Calvin, therefore, the succession finds its basis in the preaching of the Gospel, for Cajetan in the person of the apostle.

10.4.2. Evangelists and prophets

Apart from the apostles, Calvin also mentions the other two temporary offices in his commentary on Acts, namely the offices of evangelist and prophet. Evangelists, not meaning the authors of the Gospels, are mentioned only twice in the commentary on Acts. In Acts 14 Calvin comments on the fact that Luke calls Barnabas an apostle, saying that the meaning of the term 'apostle' is extended beyond the primary order (*longius quam ad primum ordinem*), adding that, properly speaking, evangelists were not apostles.¹⁸⁶ Thus, for Calvin Barnabas is an evangelist, and when Luke calls him otherwise (i.e. an apostle) it is only in a derivative sense. In his commentary on Acts 21 Calvin elaborates on this by saying that, in his opinion, evangelists were halfway between apostles and teachers. The similarity with the apostolic office he finds in the fact that, just like the apostles, they preached the Gospel everywhere and were not attached to a fixed station. However, their standing carried less honor than that of the apostles as they are mentioned after the apostles in Ephesians 4:11.¹⁸⁷ This understanding of the office of evangelists is in line with the definition Calvin gives in the Institutes, which already appeared in the 1543 edition.¹⁸⁸

In his commentary on Acts 17:30, Calvin merely mentions the prophetic office (*propheticus munus*) without discussing it. In light of what will follow in this paragraph, though, it is important to note the context, namely that of the preaching of the Gospel. Calvin says that God

(CO 7,636). After all, how often and in how many places has the succession been interrupted? And how often did heretics preside over the church? (CO 7,633) See also sermon on Acts 6:1-6, SC 8,213,14-20 & 214,1-7.

¹⁸⁴ Comm. on Acts 1:15, COR XII/1,37,3-4 & 8-10.

¹⁸⁵ Acts 1:20, TdVC, 433.

¹⁸⁶ Comm. on Acts 14:14, COR XII/2,11,32-33 & 12,1-2.

¹⁸⁷ Comm. on Acts 21:7, COR XII/2,199,11-15; see also Calvin's discussion of evangelists in his comm. on Ephesians 4:11.

¹⁸⁸ Inst. 4.3.4; see S.J. Botha, 'Calvin's Preaching on the Church in the Letter to the Ephesians', 120.

is the one directing the prophetic office, and only in this way can the Gospel have full authority.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, in Acts 13 “prophets and teachers” are considered by Calvin to be synonymous, both referring to the great many men in the church of Antioch endowed with the special gift of the Spirit of teaching. According to Calvin outstanding interpreters of Scripture are meant, and not men who were strong in the gift of foretelling.¹⁹⁰ Speaking of the gift of foretelling, in his commentary on Acts 21 there is an elaborate discussion of, what Calvin calls, the office of prophesying (*quomodo functae sint puellae istae prophetandi officio, incertum est*).¹⁹¹ Calvin says in this chapter regarding the four daughters of Philip, who were endowed with the Spirit of prophecy, that God wanted to give luster to the beginning of the Gospel with this gift of predicting coming events.¹⁹² In this particular instance prophecy is defined as predicting the future, which does not seem to be in line with his other comments mentioned thus far.

Interpreting Scripture or predicting the future – these two alternatives are also discussed by Calvin in his commentary on Ephesians 4:11.¹⁹³ There he differs from those who understand prophets to possess the gift of predicting future events, and understands this office to refer to distinguished interpreters of prophecies. By a remarkable gift of revelation they applied the prophecies to the subjects they were dealing with. He ends his discussion of the prophets in Ephesians 4 by adding that the gift of prophecy (meaning prediction of the future), which usually accompanied these prophets’ doctrinal instruction, is not excluded.¹⁹⁴ In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:28 Calvin gives a similar definition, saying that the term ‘prophets’ does not mean those who were endowed with the gift of prophesying, but those who were endowed with a peculiar gift, not merely for interpreting Scripture, but also applying it wisely for present use. He then goes on to state his reason for this choice, saying that Paul

¹⁸⁹ Comm. on Acts 17:30, COR XII/2,130,17.

¹⁹⁰ Comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,362,3-7.

¹⁹¹ Comm. on Acts 21:9, COR XII/2,200,6-7.

¹⁹² Comm. on Acts 21:9, COR XII/2,199,22-24.

¹⁹³ See also E.A. McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry. The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin’s Theology* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988), 137-139, for more on the exegetical history of Ephesians 4:11. E.A. de Boer, *The Genevan School of the Prophets* [Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance, No. DXII] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012), chapter 1, discusses the origin of the Bible studies in Zurich, Strasbourg and Geneva. In Zurich these Bible studies were actually called *Prophezei*, and were understood as opening up and explaining the meaning of Scripture. Prophecy thus became the equivalent of biblical exposition, and the related gift of languages was understood as knowledge of the biblical and classical languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin). See also W. de Greef, ‘Calvin on Prophecy’, in *Ordentlich und fruchtbar. Festschrift für Willem van’t Spijker*, ed. W.H. Neuser and H.J. Selderhuis (Leiden: Uitgeverij J.J. Groen en Zoon, 1997), 111-128.

¹⁹⁴ Comm. on Ephesians 4:11, COR II/XVI,229f.

prefers prophecy to all other gifts, on the ground that it contributes more to edification, a commendation that would not be applicable to the predicting of future events.¹⁹⁵

Note how Calvin in his commentaries on Ephesians 4:11 as well as 1 Corinthians 12:28 implicitly equates the gift of prophesying with the prediction of the future. And this makes his comments in the Ephesians and Corinthians commentaries interesting – he seems to distinguish between the office of prophet and the gift of prophesying. Whereas one might think that these two are closely connected, and that the gift of prophesying (i.e. foretelling the future) is a necessary prerequisite for being a prophet, Calvin rather discusses them as two distinct functions. He associates the office of prophet with interpreting and applying Scripture, while the gift of prophesying is understood as foretelling future events. It seems that Calvin does not wholly exclude the element of foretelling the future from the prophetic office, but it is clearly not the distinctive characteristic of this office. The reformer is also clear that the gift of prophesying, although being restored in order to make people more attentive to hear the new voice (*nova vox*) of the Gospel and adorn the new reign (*novum regnum*) of Christ, only flourished for a short time, after which it ceased to exist.¹⁹⁶

Despite apostles, evangelists and prophets being temporary offices, Calvin acknowledges that God can raise up apostles, or in their place evangelists, in times of need to bring the church back from the resistance of the Antichrist, as has happened in his own time.¹⁹⁷ In his commentary on Ephesians 4:11 he says: “... except in those cases where religion has fallen into decay, and evangelists are raised up in an extraordinary manner to restore the pure doctrine which has been lost.”¹⁹⁸ Calvin might be thinking of Luther, whom he considered to be an apostle of Christ; through his work and service the purity of the Gospel has been restored.¹⁹⁹ But it seems that he was also thinking of the reformers in general when he says that it was absolutely necessary, taking into account the confusion and disorder of the Papacy, for God to raise up men who were not always chosen according to the order of the church, but to whom he gave grace and whom he used.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ Comm. on 1 Corinthians 12:28, CO 49,506-507.

¹⁹⁶ Comm. on Acts 21:9, COR XII/2,199,24-33 & 200,1-6.

¹⁹⁷ Inst. 4.3.4, CO 2,780.

¹⁹⁸ Comm. on Ephesians 4:11, COR II/XVI,231.

¹⁹⁹ *Responsio contra Pighium*, CO 6,250.

²⁰⁰ Sermon on Ephesians 4:11-12, CO 51,558; see also B.G. Armstrong, *The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin's Teaching on the Ministry*, 99-100.

10.4.3. Elders and deacons

The two permanent offices identified by Calvin, pastors and teachers, have already been discussed in paragraph 10.3.2, and the reason for discussing it at that point has been argued there. There are, however, two offices that still need attention, those of the elders and the deacons.

In his commentary on Acts Calvin uses several interchangeable terms for what is called ‘elders’.²⁰¹ In the commentary on Acts 20:16 he calls the elders of Ephesus ‘presbyters’ (*presbyteri*), which is also the term used in the Greek text.²⁰² He defines presbyters as those on whom the office of teaching had been enjoined.²⁰³ But immediately afterwards he also calls them *seniores*, showing these two terms to be synonymous. The term *seniores* does not necessarily indicate men of advanced years, but men who rule over the church. It is usual in almost all languages, he says, that those who are placed in authority to rule over others are called ‘ancients’ (*senes*) and ‘fathers’ (*patres*), even if their age does not always correspond.²⁰⁴ The aspect of authority and governance with regards to the *presbyteri* and *seniores* also surfaces in the commentary on Acts 5:34 where Calvin says that God has set elders over his church to bring the stubborn to order²⁰⁵, as well as in the commentary on Acts 11:30, where the elders are said to have the governance of the church, even over the deacons.²⁰⁶ In his commentary on Acts 15:4 Calvin calls the rule of the presbyters ‘the ordinary government of the church’ (*ordinarium Ecclesiae regimen*) as opposed to the hither and thither travelling of the apostles²⁰⁷, although the latter did have the first rank among those endowed with the government of the church.²⁰⁸

Back to the commentary on Acts 20, but now verse 28, Calvin says that Paul calls all the Ephesian presbyters ‘bishops’ (*episcopi*), thereby introducing a third synonymous term, and adding that according to the usage of Scripture bishops do not differ from presbyters in any

²⁰¹ For the development in Calvin’s thought on the office of elder, see K. Runia, ‘Calvijns Visie op de Ambten’, 101.

²⁰² Comm. on Acts 20:16, COR XII/2,177,7-8.

²⁰³ Comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2,22,4-5.

²⁰⁴ Comm. on Acts 20:16, COR XII/2,177,12-15. For other instances where *seniores* is used, see comm. on Acts 5:34, COR XII/1,158,7-8; comm. on Acts 11:30, COR XII/1,346,18-19; comm. on Acts 12:17, COR XII/1,354,17-18. For another place where *presbyteri* and *seniores* are used interchangeably, see comm. on Acts 21:18, COR XII/2,203,27-30.

²⁰⁵ Comm. on Acts 5:34, COR XII/1,158,7-8.

²⁰⁶ Comm. on Acts 11:30, COR XII/1,346,18-25.

²⁰⁷ Comm. on Acts 15:4, COR XII/2,32,27-28 & 33,1-2.

²⁰⁸ Comm. on Acts 11:30, COR XII/1,346,18-20.

way. It is only through the vice and corruption (*vitio et corruptela*) of the Roman church that those who held the leading place in individual cities began to be called ‘bishops’. Not that Calvin has a problem with one man being prominent among others, but this is not what this word teaches.²⁰⁹

It seems, therefore, that *presbyteri*, *seniores* and *episcopi* are all used by Calvin to refer to the same office of teaching and governing. They have been given authority over a specific congregation.

Calvin views the history of Acts 6 as the creation of deacons.²¹⁰ He calls it an excellent and necessary office in the church (*quum tam praeclarum sit hoc et Ecclesiae necessarium munus*)²¹¹ and a holy thing to look after the poor²¹² – an opinion that raises the question why the apostles had not instituted it from the beginning and why the Spirit had not advised them to do so. Calvin, however, thinks that the way it transpired in Acts 6 was better, as the circumstances now convinced the people that they could not do without deacons. Otherwise they might have suspected the apostles of shying away from this task and, in addition, the willingness might have lacked to support these chosen men.²¹³

The reformer draws at least two important lessons from this history, both of which confirm the suggestion made earlier that he did not want to introduce a rigorous system of offices, but that he rather wanted to see the gifts and tasks, given by the Lord to his church, being used as the needs arose. The first lesson that he draws from the institution of deacons is, that the church cannot be formed all at once and be finished on the first day, but needs some things to be corrected and other things to be added in order to make it perfect.²¹⁴ And secondly, through the corruption of our nature and the work of Satan we are often deprived of the use of God’s gifts, as can be seen in Acts 6, where the people’s grumbling brings an end to the apostles’ stewardship. But the apostles show us that we should not put an end to institutions that are

²⁰⁹ Comm. on Acts 20:28, COR XII/2,188,2-8; comm. on 1 Peter 5:2, COR II/XX,126f. See also B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 147-148; L. Goumaz, *Het Ambt bij Calvin – Een Samenvatting naar Zijn Commentaren op het Nieuwe Testament* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1964), 17-18.

²¹⁰ For more on Calvin’s exegesis of Acts 6, see E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* [Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance, No. CXCVII] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), 153-157; D.F. Wright, ‘Calvin’s Commentary and Sermons on Acts 1-7: A Comparison’, in *Calvin, Beza and Later Calvinism. Calvin Studies Society Papers 2005*, ed. D. Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 299-302.

²¹¹ Comm. on Acts 6:1, COR XII/1,162,14 & 18-19.

²¹² Comm. on Acts 6:2, COR XII/1,165,27-29.

²¹³ Comm. on Acts 6:1, COR XII/1,162,14-28; see also E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 153, for similar remarks by Chrysostom and Bucer on delaying the introduction of the diaconate.

²¹⁴ Comm. on Acts 6:1, COR XII/1,162,28-29 & 163,1-2.

beneficial to us, but rather look for other ways to continue them.²¹⁵ This clearly shows that, for Calvin, the early church was not fitted with a fixed amount of offices right from its inception, but that there was a development as needs arose.

Two other examples may further illustrate the fluidity in Calvin's thinking, especially on the diaconate. In his commentary on the last words of Acts 6:1 Calvin engages in the discussion whether the Greeks murmured because their widows were not cared for sufficiently, or because they were overlooked in the appointment of deacons. Calvin deems the latter option to be completely plausible, as "we know that widows were chosen for the diaconate of the church at the beginning." However, he himself is of the opinion that the Greeks were murmuring because their widows were less generously cared for.²¹⁶ This shows Calvin's openness to consider the use of women for the diaconate, although it should be read in the context of his view on the diaconate as found in Institutes 4.3.9. There he says that there were two kinds of deacons: those responsible for oversight of the finances, who had a public office, and those who were actually taking care of the poor, where he allowed for women to take part.²¹⁷

A very interesting remark about the diaconate can be found in Calvin's commentary on Acts 21:7. He talks about Philip, whom Luke calls an evangelist although he was one of the seven deacons (*licet unus esset e septem Diaconis, ut visum est capite sexto*). From this he draws the remarkable, and in his eyes easy (*hinc conicere promptum est*), conclusion that that diaconate was a temporary office (*temporalis munus*), so that Philip was free to leave Jerusalem and was not a deserter.²¹⁸ This shows the ease with which Calvin deals with a changed situation. Suddenly an office that he previously considered excellent and necessary and without which the church cannot do, becomes temporary in this particular situation where Philip has been called to a more excellent charge (*sed cui excellentior provincia mandata erat*).²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Comm. on Acts 6:1, COR XII/1,163,2-21. In his sermon on Acts 6:1-3, SC 8,199,16-19 & 200,1-3, Calvin urges his listeners to ensure the continuity of this good institution, not only for twenty, thirty or forty year, but from generation to generation. Therefore, Paul even makes it into a general rule.

²¹⁶ Comm. on Acts 6:1, COR XII/1,164,12-15.

²¹⁷ Inst. 4.3.9; see for a similar division in two kinds of deacons, Calvin's sermon on Acts 6:1-3, SC 8,198,5-12.

²¹⁸ Comm. on Acts 21:7, COR XII/1,199,5-10.

²¹⁹ Comm. on Acts 21:7, COR XII/2,199,10. That Calvin did, in fact, view the diaconate as permanent, can be seen in his sermon on Acts 6:1-3. There he relates this history to Paul's words in 1 Timothy 3 and draws the conclusion that Luke is not merely telling a story about what was done once, but showing that this ought to be a lasting order in the church of God: "what the apostles did must be a lasting example to us, since we have a general rule about it from the mouth of St. Paul. He does not only show us what the apostles did, but look, he says what all Christians ought to do if they want Jesus Christ to reign and there be order in the church: it is necessary that the poor be cared for, and for this there must be deacons."

Despite this fluidity, Calvin is clear on the purpose of the deacons: although the term is a general one, they are to be considered stewards of the poor (*oeconomi pauperum*)²²⁰, which for Calvin is not a profane task but a holy one, part of worship.²²¹ The deacons are not, as the Papists have made them, handlers of the paten and chalice.²²² At this point Calvin refers his readers to his Institutes.²²³ But if the deacons were the stewards of the poor, why in Acts 11:30 did the church in Antioch send the collection to the elders and not to the deacons? Calvin says that, although the deacons were in charge of the tables, they were still under the elders and did nothing without their authority.²²⁴ Just as Calvin identifies a difference in authority and honor between the apostles and the other offices, he also sees a difference in authority and honor between the elders and the deacons. Elders are those to whom the government of the church was given, and that is the reason why the Antioch church sends the money for the poor to the elders.²²⁵

10.5. Conclusion

The offices receive significant attention in Calvin's commentary on the book of Acts. This is not surprising when one considers that the book of Acts describes the origin of the church, including its institutions. The rebirth of the church at this critical juncture would necessarily also bring about a renewed form of government. Christ provides for this government, and he does this by distributing the required gifts through the Spirit. The temporary offices – those of the apostles, evangelists and prophets – receive more attention than in most of the reformer's other commentaries. Again, this is not unexpected in a book, which plays itself out in the exact time frame when these offices were still fully functional. Especially the office of the apostles is discussed at length, and their office highlights the geographical spreading of the Gospel. The permanent offices, those of elders and deacons, also receive the necessary attention.

²²⁰ Comm. on Acts 6:3, COR XII/1,166,8-9.

²²¹ Comm. on Acts 6:2, COR XII/1,165,27-29. For Thomas de Vio Cajetan the seven are concerned with profane business and are not to be considered deacons in the liturgical sense of the word. In his commentary on Acts 6:4 and 6 he says: "From this section is entirely clear that the seven men were to be chosen to be deacons – that is to say, servants not at the altar, but at tables; for the deacons of the altar were to be free to tend to the Word of God or offer prayers, and it is said that from their quarter we will eagerly pursue prayer and the Word of God... First the apostles pray and then they lay hands over these seven deacons. Not by consecrating them as deacons (since there is no mention made of this ministry) but in order that by the laying of hands the grace of the Spirit be conferred upon them for the execution of the office which they have been inducted into – that of supervising the servers at the tables, as it was for carrying out this particular office that they are praying and laying on hands."

²²² For a discussion of the development of the diaconate in the Roman church, see E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 141-143.

²²³ Comm. on Acts 6:3, COR XII/1,166,8-14; see for the reference to the Institutes e.g. 4.3.9, 4.4.5, 4.5.15.

²²⁴ Comm. on Acts 11:30, COR XII/1,346,23-25.

²²⁵ Comm. on Acts 11:30, COR XII/1,346,18-25.

For Calvin the government of the church through the respective offices always means the rule of Christ through his Word; therefore, there is no authority and no order if the Gospel is not preached. This is what distinguishes all offices in the early church from the corrupt government of that time, as well as from the claims to authority by the Papists in Calvin's own days. Human beings have no authority when they fail to govern through the Word. The contrary is also true: when human beings govern by preaching the Word, they ought to be respected and listened to. Calvin has no problem with a hierarchical understanding of the offices – of the apostles over the other offices, and of the elders over the deacons – as long as it is the rule of Christ through his Word.

11. SOUNDING THE HEAVENLY TRUMPET

Calvin starts the original dedicatory letter to King Christian III by reminding the king of the Old Testament practice of sounding the sacred trumpets as the Jews went into battle, primarily in order to keep their focus on God. Calvin deems his own time in desperate need of such sacred trumpeting. There is, after all, only one remedy for deafness of the soul, namely if the heavenly trumpets are constantly resounding in our ears.¹ What the reformer means with the image of the trumpet, becomes clearer in his commentary on Acts 17:30. Our negligence is not to be tolerated, he says there, if we are blind in the full light of day and lie deaf or asleep, while the trumpet of the Gospel is sounding.² For Calvin, therefore, the sound of the heavenly trumpet is the sound of the Gospel, the preaching of which brought the church into existence in its proper form.³ In his commentary on Acts, as in all his works, Calvin never gets tired of sounding this trumpet or showing its indispensableness.⁴

Once again in his dedicatory letter to Christian III, and shortly after having turned the eyes of his readers to this book (i.e. the book of Acts – HHvA) in order to feast them on the sound knowledge of those things from which we must seek life, Calvin similarly speaks about the heavenly music of the Holy Spirit.⁵ The heavenly trumpet of the Gospel produces the heavenly music of the Spirit. In this way Calvin links the Spirit and the Word together in one musical dyad.

Therefore, this chapter can be considered to be the closing piece of this part of the study. It started with a discussion of the Holy Spirit, the One that was poured out on the day of Pentecost. It continued with the gifts and the offices, which flow from the inexhaustible spring, the Spirit. And it finds its way back to the Spirit via the sword of the Word. These two, Spirit

¹ Letter to Christian III, COR XII/1, LXIV.

² Comm. on Acts 17:30, COR XII/2, 130, 2-6.

³ *Argumentum* COR XII/1, 11, 28-31.

⁴ For the central place of the Word and the preaching of the Word in Calvin's theology, including concepts like *doctrina*, see e.g. E.A. de Boer, 'Geloof Onder Woorden. Over de Betekenis van het Theologisch Onderzoek naar Belijdenis en Dogma', *Radix* 10 (1984): 79; V.E. d'Assonville, *Der Begriff "doctrina" bei Johannes Calvin – eine Theologische Analyse* [Rostocker Theologische Studien, Band 6] (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2000); V.E. d'Assonville, 'The Ministry of the Word – the Concept of *Doctrina* as Used by Calvin in His First *Institutes* (1536)', *Koers* 66/1 & 2 (2001): 71-86; V.E. d'Assonville, 'Die Dood van Dogma? Calvyn se Gebruik van die Begrippe *Dogma* en *Doctrina*', *Koers* 71/1 (2006): 21-42; H.J. Selderhuis, 'Der Begriff "doctrina" in der Reformierten Tradition des 16. Jahrhunderts', in *Bewegung und Beharrung. Aspekte des Reformierten Protestantismus, 1520-1650* [Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, vol. 144], ed. C. Moser and P. Opitz (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2009), 413-432; W. van't Spijker, 'Doctrina naar Reformatorische Opvatting I', *Theologia Reformata* 20 (1977): 263-280; W. van't Spijker, 'Doctrina naar Reformatorische Opvatting II', *Theologia Reformata* 21 (1978): 7-25; I.J. Hesselink, 'Calvin's Use of *Doctrina* in His Catechisms', in *Calvinus sacramentum literarum interpres. Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 70-87.

⁵ Letter to Christian III, COR XII/1, LXV.

and Word, are inseparable for the reformer of Geneva, because “the Lord unites him (the Spirit) with the external preaching of the Gospel so as to keep us in reverence of his Word.”⁶

11.1. Calvin’s use of concepts and their relation

The citation at the end of the last paragraph already shows how Calvin uses the concepts ‘preaching’, ‘Gospel’ and ‘Word’ – ‘Scripture’ and ‘doctrine’ can be added to this list – as correlatives, and very often as synonyms. He often allows himself the freedom to alternate between two or more of these correlative concepts in one sentence, without implying a change in meaning.⁷ Thus, in his commentary on Acts 16:31, Calvin ascertains that faith is a clear knowledge of Christ gained from the Gospel (*ex Euangelio*). On the other hand, he says, take away the preaching of the Gospel (*Euangelii praedicatio*), and no faith will remain. He then summarizes that Luke links faith with preaching and teaching (*cum praedicatione et doctrina*).⁸ Faith is simultaneously based on the Gospel, the preaching of the Gospel and teaching. And these, in Calvin’s mind, are not three different things. Furthermore, in reflecting on the disciples’ prayer for boldness in speaking in Acts 4:30, Calvin remarks that the wicked cannot accept the free course of the Gospel (*Euangelium*). However, the disciples know that it is the doctrine of life (*vitae doctrina*), which God desires to have preached, and therefore they count that preaching (*praedicatio*) of greater importance than anything else.⁹ The course of the Gospel is nothing else than the preaching of the apostles, and this they know to be the doctrine of life. A last striking example will suffice to drive home the point. James’ words during the meeting in Jerusalem, where he shows that the conversion of the Gentiles is in agreement with the words of the prophets, bring Calvin to comment that the apostles reverently followed what was laid down by the Word of God (*verbo Dei*). In fact, they professed themselves to be students of Scripture (*Scriptura*). Calvin draws the conclusion from this that prophetic teaching (*doctrina Propheticae*) is still held in esteem, adding that the Spirit of God (*Spiritus Dei*)

⁶ Comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,328,3-5. For the close connection of Spirit and Word in Calvin’s theology, see e.g. S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943), 166-177; W.H. Neuser, ‘Calvins Verständnis der Heiligen Schrift’, in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor, Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture*, ed. W.H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 56-62; V.E. d’Assonville, ‘Exegesis and *Doctrina*’, in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 378-384.

⁷ See e.g. V.E. d’Assonville, ‘The Ministry of the Word – the Concept of *Doctrina* as Used by Calvin in His First Institutes (1536)’, 75-79, where the author concludes inter alia that “*doctrina* is connected to *praedicatio* with regard to the *ratio* (i.e. the method) as well as the subject of the act (i.e. God)” and “this command to preach presupposes that the preaching presents a common doctrine ... for all”.

⁸ Comm. on Acts 16:31, COR XII/2,90,32-34 & 91,1-2.

⁹ Comm. on Acts 4:30, COR XII/1,133,17-19.

speaks in all of these prophets.¹⁰ Apart from the correlation of Word, Scripture and teaching, Calvin here also adds the Holy Spirit, who works in the prophets, as well as through their words in the believers.¹¹ These examples can be multiplied by many more¹², and shows the ease with which Calvin alternates between concepts that he clearly considers to be synonyms or, at the very least, of the same or similar semantic value. This should constantly be kept in mind while reading Calvin's commentary on the book of Acts.

There are, however, also moments of distinction, instances where the freedom of alternating concepts makes way for the orderly Calvin who never ceases to think principally. This is most apparent where Calvin distinguishes between the Word / Scripture and doctrine, making the first the norm for the second.¹³ The apostles were intent on proving that their doctrine (*doctrina*) was taken from the Word of God, Calvin says in his commentary on Acts 15:16.¹⁴ The most distinctive feature of the apostles' teaching was that they were faithfully proclaiming what they had learnt from the Lord, and not what they or other people made up.¹⁵ Calvin also considers Paul's teaching, as seen in his testimony before Agrippa, to be in full agreement with the Law and the Prophets, thereby confirming the heavenly vision, which ordered him to teach (*docere*) only what was in accordance with Scripture.¹⁶ In Calvin's view Scripture should be the norm for testing every method of teaching (*ad cuius normam omnis docendi ratio exigenda est*), and is, in fact, the only method of teaching properly (*imo quae sola est recte docendi methodus*).¹⁷ In these cases there is a subtle distinction between the Word of God, as found in Scripture, and the doctrine – mainly the apostles' – based upon it. Calvin wants to emphasize that Scripture, although itself being *doctrina*, is also the source of *doctrina*. Doctrine comes from God's mouth and is in accordance with Scripture.¹⁸ When Luke, in Acts 17:2, says that Paul reasoned from Scripture, Calvin immediately concludes that proofs of the

¹⁰ Comm. on Acts 15:15, COR XII/2,49,25-28 & 33.

¹¹ See P. Opitz, 'Scripture', in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 274-275.

¹² See e.g. comm. on Acts 10:43 (teaching and preaching), Acts 12:24 (Word and Gospel), Acts 16:14 (preaching, Word, Scripture, revelation), Acts 17:11 (doctrine, Scripture, Spirit).

¹³ See W.H. Neuser, 'Calvins Verständnis der Heiligen Schrift', 53-55. In *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,413, Calvin repudiates the desire of the Papists, convened in the Council of Trent, to make certainty of doctrine depend not only on Scripture, but also on the *agrapha* (the unwritten). He reminds them of Augustine's rule that faith is conceived from the Scriptures.

¹⁴ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,50,26-27.

¹⁵ Comm. on Acts 8:24, COR XII/1,249,20-21.

¹⁶ Comm. on Acts 26:19, COR XII/2,281,20-22.

¹⁷ Comm. on Acts 20:20, COR XII/2,179,4-5; see also comm. on Acts 7:38, COR XII/1,204,11-13.

¹⁸ V.E. d'Assonville, 'Exegesis and *Doctrina*', 379-380.

faith are only to be sought from the mouth of God.¹⁹ And against the accusation that, what the reformers teach from Scripture (*ex Scripturis*) about the secret predestination of God, turns God into a tyrant, Calvin replies that they only speak what God teaches from his own mouth.²⁰ When Paul wants to produce suitable witnesses for his teaching, he cites Moses and the prophets, i.e. the Scriptures. From this Calvin draws the principle that sound teaching only mentions what comes from the mouth of God.²¹ In all these instances there is an explicit or implicit link between doctrine, Scripture and what comes from the mouth of God. The mouth of God is the source from which the Word, as found in Scripture, comes. And doctrine should always be in accordance with this.

Those examples found in the book of Acts of teaching being based on Scripture is proof for Calvin of the Roman fallacy that nothing certain can be deducted from Scripture. Paul's superiority in his debates against the Jews in Acts 9:22 is based on the fact that Scripture was his sword. But, unfortunately, the Papists find no weapons in Scripture and say that nothing can be settled with certainty from Scripture.²² Also in Acts 17, where it is said that Paul reasoned from the Scriptures, Calvin says that the Papists are driven by a diabolical madness when they deny that any certainty can be acquired from the Scriptures, and that they therefore must depend on the opinions of men. It begs the question: was Paul's method of arguing from Scripture legitimate or not? At least the Jews could admit it to be legitimate, but the pope and his people laugh when Scripture is quoted in public.²³ Later in the same chapter Calvin explicates what he means with the 'opinions of men', when he says that the Thessalonians' examination of Paul's teaching refutes the Papal assertion that faith depends only on what the church decides. The pope wants everyone to accept what he says, but is he superior to Paul who's teaching the Thessalonians were allowed to investigate?²⁴ The opinions of men essentially refer to what the Roman church considers the infallible utterances of the pope. But, says Calvin, "with the Spirit as Leader and Director, believers will form a judgment about any doctrine at all from no other source than the Scriptures."²⁵

¹⁹ Comm. on Acts 17:2, COR XII/2,96,12-13.

²⁰ Comm. on Acts 6:14, COR XII/1,173,24-29.

²¹ Comm. on Acts 26:22, COR XII/2,283,5-9.

²² Comm. on Acts 9:22, COR XII/1,278,12-13 & 15-18.

²³ Comm. on Acts 17:2, COR XII/2,96,20-27.

²⁴ Comm. on Acts 17:11, COR XII/2,105,27-34 & 106,1-2.

²⁵ Comm. on Acts 17:11, COR XII/2,105,25-27.

11.2. Doctrina

It is this very foundation of Scripture, as seen in the previous paragraph, that enables Calvin to speak in such lofty terms of doctrine as *doctrina Dei*²⁶, *doctrina Christi*²⁷, *caelestis doctrina*²⁸, *doctrina vitae*²⁹, *doctrina Euangelii*³⁰, *doctrina pietatis*³¹. With this he always means the sound (*sana doctrina*)³² and pure doctrine (*pura doctrina*)³³. None of these qualifications are suddenly nullified when Calvin, in the key passage in Acts 2:42, speaks about the doctrine of the apostles (*doctrina Apostolorum*). This expression does not indicate a human origin, but merely indicates that the apostles deliver what properly belongs to Christ.³⁴ The doctrine of the apostles, the spreading of which is described in the book of Acts, is the heavenly doctrine.³⁵ God himself is the Author of this doctrine, and in an unbroken course of time it was handed down by the prophets, a pattern that the apostles and other ministers have to follow. This is true antiquity, in contrast to the Papists' boast of antiquity when they, instead of preaching the blood of Christ, bring in the rotten fabrications of their own satisfactions.³⁶ *Doctrina* is of such importance to Calvin that, in his discussion of the title 'disciple' for Tabitha in Acts 9:36, he can even say that this title is a warning that Christianity does not exist without teaching (*doctrina*).³⁷ In Calvin's view doctrine, whether true or corrupt, determines the very being and state of the church, and not the other way round.³⁸ On the one hand the corruption of doctrine is a deadly disaster for the church, while on the other hand the state of the church will be sound if Christ is the only Master that is heard.³⁹ The importance of doctrine becomes

²⁶ See e.g. comm. on Acts 7:38, COR XII/1,205,19; comm. on Acts 10:33, COR XII/1,315,9-10.

²⁷ See e.g. comm. on Acts 1:1, COR XII/1,16,19; comm. on Acts 8:4, COR XII/1,234,34; comm. on Acts 15:2, COR XII/2,30,4-5.

²⁸ See e.g. comm. on Acts 18:25, COR XII/2,149,17; comm. on Acts 19:9, COR XII/2,158,12; comm. on Acts 19:35, COR XII/2,170,28.

²⁹ See e.g. comm. on Acts 4:30, COR XII/1,133,18; comm. on Acts 5:20, COR XII/1,149,14-15, where doctrine is described as *quod vivifica sit doctrina*. See also *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,593.

³⁰ See e.g. comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,80,24-25; comm. on Acts 13:44, COR XII/1,400,17; comm. on Acts 19:13, COR XII/2,160,21.

³¹ See e.g. comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2,21,28; comm. on Acts 23:29, COR XII/2,246,7-8.

³² See e.g. comm. on Acts 13:45, COR XII/1,400,20; comm. on Acts 17:11, COR XII/2,103,24; comm. on Acts 23:6, COR XII/2,234,31. See also *Cum antidoto*, CO 7,427.

³³ See e.g. comm. on Acts 4:11, COR XII/1,122,5; comm. on Acts 13:11, COR XII/1,372,10. The heart of Calvin's battle with the Papists has to do with the purity of doctrine, as can be seen from his *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,8,7 & 8,18 & 9,16. See also *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,591-592.

³⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,28-29 & 88,20-21.

³⁵ This is what Calvin calls the speeches of the apostles in his *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,13,8-12.

³⁶ Comm. on Acts 3:21, COR XII/1,107,16-18; comm. on Acts 10:43, COR XII/1,327,2-7.

³⁷ Comm. on Acts 9:36, COR XII/1,287,1-3.

³⁸ See for the priority of doctrine over church, Calvin's comments on Acts 26:7, COR XII/2,275,2-3.

³⁹ Comm. on Acts 20:30, COR XII/2,190,22 & 26-27.

even clearer when attention is paid to a powerful expression in the reformer's vocabulary, namely his description of doctrine as the soul of the church (*anima Ecclesiae*).⁴⁰

This expression can already be found in Calvin's dedicatory letters, where he uses it primarily to show the receivers of his letters the difference between the newly reformed church and the heretics.

In the letter to Christian III, again used to address Nicolaus Radziwil eight years later, Calvin attacks the Roman Antichrist, who claims to have and to be the church but who is only producing a dead body. After all, the Son of God is the Head of the church, the fountain of eternal life, quickening the church by his Spirit, but the pope and his hirelings have cut off the head. The true Christ has been banished by the Papists. They are left with a dead body for the reason that they have abolished the teaching of the Gospel, which is the true soul of the church and the only thing that gives it life (*quae vera Ecclesiae anima est eamque sola vivificat*).⁴¹ As an example of the fact that the Papists are ruling according to their own desires, Calvin refers to the Council of Trent who, by the time he reused this letter to Nicolaus Radziwil, was meeting in Bologna. He calls upon his readers to keep using the Word to show the difference between the true church and the Roman Curia (*quid denique inter veram Ecclesiam et Romanam curiam intersit*), proof of which can be found when the church as described by Luke is compared with the pope's synagogue.⁴²

In his letter to Nicolaus Radziwil in 1560 Calvin, just before 'recycling' the portion against the Papists, inserts a paragraph on the heresies of Franciscus Stancaricus and George Blandrata.⁴³ In order to counter these evils he advises Radziwil to establish a proper and well-ordered method of government, as it will serve as a protector of holy peace. It is in this context that Calvin again uses the image of the body: "For as it is well known that purity of doctrine

⁴⁰ For more on Calvin's anthropology, including his view on body and soul, see M.R. Miles, 'Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion"', *The Harvard Theological Review* 74(3) (1981): 303-323; C.L. Elwood, 'Calvin's Ecclesial Theology and Human Salvation', in *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society, 1509-2009*, ed. M.E. Hirzel and M. Sallmann (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 97-99. Other places where Calvin uses the image of doctrine as the soul of the church can be found in CO 1,557, 658; CO 6,459-460, 467; CO 10,224; CO 13,89; CO 15,333, 335; CO 52,283. In *Supplex exhortatio* Calvin twice uses this expression. He says that, whereas all matters of order resemble the body, doctrine is the soul which animates the body, renders it lively and active, and makes it not to be a dead and useless carcass (CO 6,459-460). A little later he reminds the emperor, to whom this tract was addressed, that the safety of the church depends as much on doctrine as human life does on the soul. If the purity of doctrine is in any way impaired, the church receives a deadly wound (CO 6,467).

⁴¹ Letter to Christian III, COR XII/1, LXV-LXVI.

⁴² Letter to Christian III, COR XII/1, LXVII.

⁴³ For more on Stancaricus and Blandrata, see A. Baars, *Om Gods Verhevenheid en Zijn Nabijheid* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2004), 236-242 & 256-258.

is the soul of the church, so we may justifiably compare discipline to the sinews, by which the body is bound and connected together, and so preserves its strength.”⁴⁴ The image of the body with its soul is in this instance expanded by adding the sinews.

An important passage where this image again surfaces, is in Calvin’s discussion of the marks of the true church in Acts 2:42. Luke, he says, begins with doctrine, which is the soul of the church. And this is not just any doctrine, but the doctrine of the apostles, which the Son had delivered by their hands.⁴⁵ Just like in the dedicatory letters, Calvin puts his discussion of doctrine in the context of the conflict with the Papists who confidently thunder out the name of the church, but who have shamefully corrupted the entire teaching of the apostles.⁴⁶ For Calvin the central question in the conflict with the Papists always remains: have they retained the purity of doctrine? His answer is unambiguous: they are as far from it as hell is from heaven. And this ultimately determines the veracity of their claim to be the church: whether the simplicity of the doctrine, handed down by the apostles, flourishes in it.⁴⁷

In the following paragraph of his commentary on Acts 2:42 Calvin shows that doctrine also determines the unity in the church: doctrine is the bond of brotherly fellowship. Fellowship – and the other marks of the church – follows from doctrine as fruits or effects (*tanquam fructus vel effectus manant*).⁴⁸ In Calvin’s mind this makes the history found in Acts 15 so tense, because there we do not find external persecutions, but internal divisions (*ab intestinis dissidiis*). We find the brothers in conflict with one another and the church in a state of internal upheaval over doctrine, which alone is the holy bond of brotherly unity (*quae una sacrum est vinculum fraternae unitatis*). This state of affairs will undoubtedly damage the Gospel, for it discourages weak consciences and provides the ungodly with ammunition to speak evil of it.⁴⁹ In this situation Paul could not have remained silent about the matter that was disputed. Peace, Calvin says, is certainly a pleasing word, but cursed is the peace that is obtained at the cost of the doctrine of Christ, by which alone we grow together into a godly and holy unity.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,7,14-23 & 8,1-9.

⁴⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,24-29.

⁴⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,3-6.

⁴⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,15-16 & 19-21.

⁴⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,22-24.

⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 15:1, COR XII/2,25,25-31 & 26,1-6.

⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 15:2, COR XII/2,30,2-5.

11.3. Doctrina and dogma

It is worthwhile to compare Calvin's high view of *doctrina* with his use of the term *dogma*. Statistically Calvin, in his commentary on Acts, uses *doctrina* and *dogma* similar to the trend identified by others, which means that *doctrina* is used significantly more often than *dogma*. And in terms of the meaning conveyed by Calvin, the negative usage of *dogma* dominates.⁵¹ This is most clearly seen when *doctrina* and *dogma* are used in the same context.

Calvin's dedicatory letter to Nicolaus Radziwil provides an implicit example. After accusing Franciscus Stancarus and George Blandrata of spreading errors, Calvin acknowledges that, at least, they are free from the perverse and sacrilegious dogmas (*a perversis illis et sacrilegis dogmatibus remotos esse*) of Servetus. In order to prevent this infection from happening, the reformer advises Radziwil to establish a proper and well-ordered method of government. For, while purity of doctrine (*doctrinae puritas*) is the soul of the church, discipline (referring back to the method of government) is comparable to the sinews by which the body is bound and connected together.⁵² Clear qualifiers (*perversa* and *sacrilega*, *puritas*) color *dogma* and *doctrina* respectively in a negative and a positive light.

In his commentary on Acts 8:13 Calvin, with reference to the parable of the sower, speaks about Simon's temporary faith (*fides temporaria*), saying that he was forced by the awareness of his conscience to accept the teaching of the Gospel (*Euangelii doctrina*), although the crucial element of self-denial was absent.⁵³ In contrast to this positive use of *doctrina*, *dogma* is used very negatively a few lines further on. There Calvin comments on the fact that Simon, although only possessing temporary faith, was nonetheless baptized. In this context the reformer uses *dogma* to refer to a specific Papal doctrine regarding baptism, which says that unless anyone presents the obstacle of mortal sin, all men receive the truth and the effect with

⁵¹ See e.g. V.E. d'Assonville, 'Die Dood van Dogma?', 25-26; E.A. de Boer, 'Geloof Onder Woorden', 79. Against the almost 400 times that *doctrina* is used, *dogma* is used only 10 times. In his sermon on Acts 7:15-19, SC 8,279,29-31, Calvin uses *doctrine* in the French, and qualifies it with *vraye* and *faulxe* respectively.

⁵² Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,7,22-23 & 8,6-8.

⁵³ Comm. on Acts 8:13, COR XII/1,239,11-15.

the signs.⁵⁴ The use of *doctrina* is qualified positively by the use of the noun *Euangelium*, while *dogma* is qualified negatively by the use of *Papista*.⁵⁵

Calvin's use of *doctrina* and *dogma* in one sentence in his commentary on Acts 23:29 offers further insight into his use of these terms. Again *doctrina* and *dogma* are qualified, the former by the noun *pietas*, the latter by the adjectives *pravum*, *impium* and *falsum*. In this one sentence *doctrina* and *dogma* are deliberately contrasted with one another. Initially pious *doctrina* is corrupted by bad and godless *dogma*, after which also the church is disturbed by false *dogma*.⁵⁶

What is clear from the cases cited thus far is that, when *doctrina* and *dogma* are used in the same context, the former has a positive meaning while the latter is used negatively (this emotional value is often conveyed by adding descriptive nouns or adjectives). Furthermore, *doctrina* (singular) seems to indicate a single and unified whole, representing the single soul of the church and the only Gospel, and leads to a single life of godliness. In comparison, *dogma* (used both in singular and plural forms) seems to indicate a limitation – a specific (Papal) doctrine (e.g. baptism, honoring the saints, praying to the dead) or a certain limited amount of doctrines.⁵⁷

This contrasting use of *doctrina* and *dogma* can be traced back to their respective origins.⁵⁸ With *dogma* the human element and origin stand central.⁵⁹ In the examples cited above this human element was portrayed negatively, and this can be confirmed by another clear example. In his commentary on Acts 20:30 Calvin explicitly says that the enemies of the Gospel, the

⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 8:13, COR XII/1,239,22-24. For similar references to a specific (Papal) doctrine, see Calvin's commentary on Acts 10:25, COR XII/1,311,24-26, where he calls the Papal distinction between *latia*, *dulia* and *hyperdulia* a new *dogma* (*novum dogma*); see also his commentary on Acts 15:10, COR XII/2,41,1-2, where the custom of praying for the dead is called a plausible doctrine (*imo plausibile est dogma*) as it has a show of human piety, but in the end it transfers the virtue of the work of Christ to the works of men.

⁵⁵ V.E. d'Assonville, 'Die Dood van Dogma?', 32-33. See something similar in Calvin's commentary on Acts 9:29-30, COR XII/1,282,8-10 & 20-21, where Calvin first teaches the godly to be inflamed with a holy wrath when they see the pure truth of God being corrupted by false and spurious dogmas (*quum vident falsis et reprobis dogmatibus corrupti puram Dei veritatem*), while shortly afterwards recounting Paul's mission to Tarsus to bring the teaching of the Gospel (*Euangelii doctrina*) to that place.

⁵⁶ Comm. on Acts 23:29, COR XII/2,246,6-8 & 13. For another example of Calvin's use of false dogma, see his commentary on Acts 10:1, COR XII/1,293,10-12, where he shows how privileged Cornelius was to learn from an upright worshipper who was untouched by false doctrines (*ab adulterinis dogmatibus*).

⁵⁷ V.E. d'Assonville, 'Die Dood van Dogma?', 33, comes to a similar conclusion. For the unity of *doctrina*, based on the unity of Scripture (*tota Scriptura*), see V.E. d'Assonville, 'Exegesis and *Doctrina*', 379-380.

⁵⁸ V.E. d'Assonville, 'Die Dood van Dogma?', 36-38.

⁵⁹ For the use of the word *dogma* in the New Testament, see E.A. de Boer, 'Geloof Onder Woorden', 72-73. He shows that in two instances (Luke 2:1 and Acts 17:7) *dogma* refers to a decree of the emperor. In another two instances *dogma* has the meaning of a certain philosophical view (Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14). Finally, there is also an ecclesiastical use of *dogma*, when Luke calls the decisions of the meeting in Jerusalem in Acts 15 *dogmata* (see Acts 16:4). Interestingly, Calvin does not simply copy Luke's word, but translates it as *decreta*, comm. on Acts 16:4, COR XII/2,66,29 & 69,32-33; see also his use of *decreta* in his commentary on Acts 15.

grievous wolves, will be the authors of perverse doctrine (*deinde pravorum dogmatum fore auctores*).⁶⁰ The human element, however, does not necessarily have to be negative. There is one instance in his commentary on Acts where Calvin uses *dogma* in a positive sense while still stressing the human involvement. This is when Paul is defending himself before Agrippa. Calvin comments that Paul confirms his teaching (*doctrina*) firstly from the Word of God, and afterwards he adds the agreement of the church. This, Calvin says, is the correct way to affirm the *dogma fidei*, the authority of God taking the lead, and the approval of the church following.⁶¹ Here the use of *dogma* clearly reflects the reception of the Word, the human confession as answer to the preaching of the Word. However, Calvin can only use it in a positive sense because God in his Word lends authority to what humans (i.e. the church) afterwards merely affirm and approve. Here, in contrast to the example of Acts 20:30, humans are not the authors of doctrine, but merely the receivers and confessors of God's Word. Whereas *dogma* has a strong human element and origin, *doctrina* has its origin with God. This accounts for the unity of doctrine, the one soul of the church, and furthermore explains Calvin's repetitive use of terms like *doctrina Dei*, *doctrina Christi*, *caelestis doctrina*, and *doctrina Euangelii*.

11.4. The working of the Word

In the *Argumentum* to his commentary, after stating that the book of Acts reviews for us the origin and progress of the church, Calvin adds that this book also shows us the power of Christ and the efficacy and force (*efficacia et vis*) of the Gospel itself. For the reformer these characteristics are typical elements of the book of Acts. After all, it was not his intention to repeat what was common to all sacred histories, but only to highlight the peculiarities of this particular book.⁶² Acts, therefore, is the book of the beginning and progress of the church, it is the book of the power of Christ, and it is also the book of the efficacy and force of the Gospel.⁶³

⁶⁰ Comm. on Acts 20:30, COR XII/2,191,12.

⁶¹ Comm. on Acts 26:7, COR XII/2,274,35-36 & 275,1-3; see also E.A. de Boer, 'Geloof Onder Woorden', 79-81.

⁶² *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,17-19.

⁶³ In his sermon on Acts 4:5-12, SC 8,82,1-4, Calvin beautifully describes the power of the Gospel: "We know the Gospel is the light of God by which our paths are illuminated on the road to salvation. We know it is nourishment and eternal life. We know it is the power of God. We know it is his righteousness, by which he justifies us. We know it is his way of delivering us from sin and death."

However, for Calvin the power of Christ and the efficacy of the Gospel are not two separate realities, but it was precisely through the power of the Gospel, brought by men of no importance and endowed with no skill, that Christ gave proof of his divine power.⁶⁴ Or stated differently: the preaching of the Gospel is an effective instrument of the divine power. This Calvin says in his commentary on Acts 10:44, when he sees, as if in a picture, the outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles.⁶⁵ This paragraph will focus on the efficacy and power of the Word, but the power of the risen Christ as the driving force behind it should always be kept in mind.

The power of the Word can firstly be seen from its growth, as is evident in several key passages in Acts (e.g. 6:7, 12:24 and 19:20). Calvin understands the growth of the Word in a twofold way: firstly when new disciples are added to the church (this includes the geographical spreading of the Gospel), and secondly when each one makes progress on an individual level.⁶⁶ In his commentary on Acts 19:20 Calvin comes to the same distinction, although in a somewhat different way. There he takes *crescere* to refer to the quantitative increase of the church because of the adding of new disciples, while *confirmare* is taken as the qualitative progress in obedience and godliness of individual believers.⁶⁷ Both these aspects recur throughout Calvin's commentary, as well as in his sermons on these same verses.⁶⁸ For the quantitative sense reference has already been made to the growth of the Word in Acts 6:7 and 19:20, where Calvin in both cases speaks about the 'number' (*numerus*) of believers.⁶⁹ He compares the progress of the Gospel with the parable of the leaven (Luke 13:21), in this case referring to the spreading of the Word throughout the city of Antioch and the surrounding region.⁷⁰ He warns his readers from the outset that this growth and progress do not fail to raise the resistance of the whole world.⁷¹ When the ungodly see the progress of sound doctrine (*progressus sanae doctrinae*), they leap to resist it.⁷² Yet the church always survives its enemies. The Word of God can repeatedly appear to be suppressed by the wicked tyranny of

⁶⁴ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,4-9.

⁶⁵ Comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,327,28-30.

⁶⁶ Comm. on Acts 6:7, COR XII/1,169,15-18.

⁶⁷ Comm. on Acts 19:20, COR XII/2,164,20-25.

⁶⁸ See D.F. Wright, 'Calvin's Commentary and Sermons on Acts 1-7: A Comparison', in *Calvin, Beza and Later Calvinism. Calvin Studies Society Papers 2005*, ed. D. Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 292-293.

⁶⁹ Comm. on Acts 6:7, COR XII/1,169,19; comm. on Acts 19:20, COR XII/2,164,20-21.

⁷⁰ Comm. on Acts 13:49, COR XII/1,406,19-23.

⁷¹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,9-10 & 15ff.

⁷² Comm. on Acts 13:45, COR XII/1,400,20-21.

men, but it always rises up again.⁷³ Therefore Calvin can close his commentary with a reference to Paul's words in 2 Timothy 2:9 – although Paul was bound, the Word of God was not.⁷⁴

The qualitative growth of the Word also gets the necessary attention. It is not enough for believers to only be instructed once in the right doctrine, but they need to make continual progress (*continuos progressus*). Calvin then draws the interesting conclusion, that this is the reason why Christ not only sent apostles to spread the Gospel, but also commanded the appointment of pastors for the daily preaching of the Word.⁷⁵ This implies that the apostles were primarily responsible for the numerical and geographical progress of the Gospel, while the pastor's first task is to see to the individual believer's growth in depth. However, Calvin does not fail to also highlight the believer's own responsibility. He commends the Thessalonians⁷⁶ for making progress (*proficiunt*) and exercising themselves in constant reading of Scripture.⁷⁷ All who desire to make proper progress (*proficere*) in the Gospel should turn their senses towards it.⁷⁸ But unlike Peter, who thought intently about the vision of the sheet with the animals, we are often indifferent about the discipline of inquiring, and therefore lack progress in the Word of God (*non melius proficimus in verbo Domini*).⁷⁹

However, the efficacy of the Word is not only proven in people who come to faith and make progress in the faith. The power of the Word does not only have a positive referent, but also an important negative referent. Calvin considers the Word effective in its working, whether in believers or in unbelievers.

On the one hand, the healing of the lame man in Acts 3 makes clear both the efficacy of the Word (*Verbi efficacia*) and the fruit of faith. The efficacy of the Word is apparent from the fact that it works obedience in the cripple and strengthens his legs so that he can walk.⁸⁰ But on the other hand Calvin can just as well see the effectiveness of the Word (*Verbi efficacia*) in the raging of the priests in Acts 5:33. Although the Word did not change them for the better, it did penetrate their hearts and stirred their consciences. Their fury is a result of their guilt;

⁷³ Comm. on Acts 12:24, COR XII/1,360,11-20.

⁷⁴ Comm. on Acts 28:31, COR XII/2,317,2-3.

⁷⁵ Comm. on Acts 14:23, COR XII/2,21,27-31.

⁷⁶ For some reason Calvin speaks about the Thessalonians, while already being in Berea, see comm. on Acts 17:11, COR XII/2,103,21 & 105,1.

⁷⁷ Comm. on Acts 17:11, COR XII/2,103,26-28.

⁷⁸ Comm. on Acts 26:18, COR XII/2,280,5-6.

⁷⁹ Comm. on Acts 10:17, COR XII/1,306,23-29.

⁸⁰ Comm. on Acts 3:6, COR XII/1,97,11-14.

they feel that their judge is pressing them.⁸¹ Even in the death of Ananias Calvin detects the efficacy of the Word (*Verbi efficacia*). Not so much in his physical death, but in the spiritual death of the soul that finds a visible symbol in Ananias' body. Since the proper nature of the Word is to save, it must indeed bring death to those who reject the salvation it offers.⁸² These examples show that the Word is indeed the sword that cuts both ways. In some it mortifies the flesh that we may be offered as a sacrifice to God. However, this pricking of the heart leads others to flee from God, to fret and murmur, and to furiously resist.⁸³ Some bestow honor on the Word when they submit to it in trust and obedience⁸⁴, others have no respect for it and treat it like a profane novelty.⁸⁵ And sometimes it may even be God's purpose to have the Gospel presented to the reprobate, not so that they may benefit from it, but so that all excuse may be taken away from them.⁸⁶

11.5. Word and sign

Calvin's view on the position of the Word comes out most clearly when it is related to how he understands the extraordinary signs (like miracles and visions) that occur throughout the book of Acts. Calvin does not stand apathetic towards these signs, as they show us the power and grace of God.⁸⁷ And in his commentary on Acts 5:12 he can even make the bold statement that it is Luke's intention to show that the church increased by miracles (*miraculis auctam fuisse Ecclesiam*), a commendation he would almost always reserve for the Word. This is, in fact, the exact qualification he adds immediately after making this statement – miracles serve the faith, and should never be separated from the Word.⁸⁸ By now his bold statement has almost been forgotten, and the added qualification becomes, for Calvin, the golden rule for understanding the use of miracles. If, and this is a big if, miracles have at any time been worked apart from the Word, it was only on very rare occasions, and the result following it was very meager. God hardly ever allows miracles to be detached from his Word, but he works them so that people might know him in his Word.⁸⁹

⁸¹ Comm. on Acts 5:33, COR XII/1,156,27-30; see also comm. on Acts 24:26, COR XII/2,260,29-32, where Calvin says something similar with regards to Felix.

⁸² Comm. on Acts 5:5, COR XII/1,13-17 & 22-24.

⁸³ Comm. on Acts 2:37, COR XII/1,79,13-15 & 23-25. For other instances of Calvin's use of the image of the sword, see his comm. on Acts 9:22, 10:13, 18:25; *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,464.

⁸⁴ Comm. on Acts 13:48, COR XII/1,404,28-29.

⁸⁵ Comm. on Acts 17:18, COR XII/2,112,1-2.

⁸⁶ Comm. on Acts 24:25, COR XII/1,260,17-19.

⁸⁷ Comm. on Acts 14:3, COR XII/2,5,13-14.

⁸⁸ Comm. on Acts 5:12, COR XII/1,144,12-13.

⁸⁹ Comm. on Acts 14:3, COR XII/2,5,15-20.

In his commentary on Acts 3:9 Calvin approaches the matter a little differently, but with the same basic principle. There he says that the people's astonishment, following the healing of the lame man, served as a kind of foundation for the building that was to come (*fuit ergo quasi fundamentum futuri aedificii*). However, this foundation is in itself not enough without the assistance of doctrine. We should, therefore, learn to reverently consider the works of God, so that our astonishment may serve as an entrance for doctrine. We need to join miracles with doctrine, and the one is not to be separated from the other.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, this is what happens in Popery because of their deafness to the Word, and it has led to a cult of saints and other superstitions.⁹¹ They try to lead the world away from reverence of God and the Gospel by mere miracles.⁹² Therefore Calvin's conclusion in both these verses is similar. We should seek medicine from the Word, so that when miracles occur, doctrine may direct us to the right purpose.⁹³ And: "We must keep to the principle that the miracles that come from God have never any other purpose than the establishing of the Gospel in its full and genuine authority."⁹⁴ The same principle applies to visions. Moses' vision, as recounted by Stephen in Acts 7:30-31, has its authority in the Word of God. For bare visions would be of little use without the addition of teaching. And teaching, Calvin says, is not inferior to visions, but rather the cause and purpose (*causa et finis*) of all visions.⁹⁵ Even Peter needed further instruction after seeing the vision of the sheet with the animals. He was not only instructed by the vision but also by the Word of God. And still he does not understand, until the Spirit interprets it to him.⁹⁶

Although Calvin generally considers the time of miracles and vision limited to the beginning of the church, it does not render this principle useless and superfluous. After all, he sees the same principle at work in the sacraments, and only a few from the many possible examples will suffice.

When Stephen, in his speech in Acts 7, speaks about the covenant of circumcision that God made with Abraham, Calvin says that circumcision is preceded by the promises of God. For unless signs are preceded by the Word, they are empty and worthless.⁹⁷ The most important

⁹⁰ Comm. on Acts 3:9, COR XII/1,98,4-19.

⁹¹ Comm. on Acts 3:9, COR XII/1,98,20-32.

⁹² Comm. on Acts 14:3, COR XII/2,5,23-25.

⁹³ Comm. on Acts 3:9, COR XII/1,98,32-34.

⁹⁴ Comm. on Acts 14:3, COR XII/2,5,25-27.

⁹⁵ Comm. on Acts 7:32, COR XII/1,198,4-8.

⁹⁶ Comm. on Acts 10:17, COR XII/1,306,18-19.

⁹⁷ Comm. on Acts 7:8, COR XII/1,183,22-24.

thing in all sacraments is that the Word of God, engraved in it, may give its light, and that its voice may clearly sound.⁹⁸ The true use of sacraments is to initiate us into doctrine, and it would be wrong to separate them from teaching. In order for sacraments to be administered rightly, the heavenly teaching should resound in them.⁹⁹

For Calvin, therefore, sacraments function according to the same principle as the signs and visions discussed earlier in this paragraph – either paving the way for the Word, or afterwards depicting the Word, but never without the Word.¹⁰⁰ There is an analogical and anagogical aspect that needs to be understood. The signs are analogical in that they stress the similarity amid difference between the sign and the reality signified. But they are also anagogical in that they stress the elevation from the temporal sign to the spiritual reality it represents.¹⁰¹ This is Calvin's duality of sign and thing signified, which Janse traces back to neo-Platonic-Augustinian thought: "This duality tries to prevent exaggerated sacramental realism, sacramental automatism, and veneration of the elements."¹⁰² Just as with signs and visions, the sacraments as visible reality depict a heavenly reality, Jesus Christ as he is found in the Word. Against the Papal elevation of the signs to a level of miraculous working (*ex opere operato*), Calvin stresses that the signs, including the sacraments, are gifts of God and consist of Word and sign, in this order.¹⁰³

11.6. Conclusion

Calvin closes the *Argumentum* to his commentary on Acts by saying that without the book of Acts we would, among other valuable things, not have known that the apostles were inspired (*afflatus*) by the Holy Spirit not to teach anything except what was from God.¹⁰⁴ This inspiration turns the apostles' speeches (*Apostolorum conciones*), as recorded in the book of Acts, into heavenly doctrine (*caelestis doctrina*), and there is no need to look anywhere else for the whole substance of godliness (*tota pietatis summa*).¹⁰⁵ In fact, not only the speeches,

⁹⁸ Comm. on Acts 10:37, COR XII/1,321,4-6.

⁹⁹ Comm. on Acts 18:25, COR XII/2,149,13-17.

¹⁰⁰ For more on this aspect, see E.A. de Boer, *John Calvin on the Visions of Ezekiel. Historical and Hermeneutical Studies in John Calvin's 'Sermon Inédits', Especially on Ezek. 36-48* [Kerkhistorische Bijdragen, volume 21] (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2004), 107-130.

¹⁰¹ See R.C. Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor and Theologian* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 209-211.

¹⁰² W. Janse, 'The Sacraments', in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 346.

¹⁰³ See also B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 111-113.

¹⁰⁴ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,14,15-17.

¹⁰⁵ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,13,8-12.

but also the whole book of Acts originated from the Holy Spirit and is therefore a vast treasure.¹⁰⁶

This book has the new power (*nova vis*) from above¹⁰⁷ as its source, thereby putting it on the same level with David and the other prophets, to whom references are made, who were also under the direction of the Spirit.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the Spirit is the one illuminating the minds of those who listened to Peter and Paul and the other apostles, working faith in them as a result.¹⁰⁹ Jews and Gentiles embrace the Word through the Spirit of faith.¹¹⁰ Calvin confirms both these principles (the inspiration and the illumination) in his Institutes when he says: “The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.”¹¹¹ As a result of this conviction, Calvin dismisses the fanatics who call on the Spirit in order to reject external teaching.¹¹² He also refutes the Papists who are as far distant as hell is from heaven from retaining the purity of doctrine. And he finds the true church only through the guidance of the Spirit, who says that the church is to be found where the simplicity of the doctrine, as handed down by the apostles, flourishes.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,14,19-20.

¹⁰⁷ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,24 & 29-30.

¹⁰⁸ Comm. on Acts 1:16, COR XII/1,38; comm. on Acts 2:30, COR XII/1,73,17-21.

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. comm. on Acts 3:6, COR XII/1,97,24-26; comm. on Acts 10:17, COR XII/1,306,18-19; comm. on Acts 16:14, COR XII/2,76,23-27 & 77,10-13.

¹¹⁰ Comm. on Acts 11:2, COR XII/1,332,14-18.

¹¹¹ Inst. 1.7.4, CO 2,59.

¹¹² Comm. on Acts 16:14, COR XII/2,77,14-16; for the Spirit’s work through the external preaching, see also comm. on Acts 8:31, COR XII/1,255,14-16; comm. on Acts 10:44, COR XII/1,328,3-5.

¹¹³ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,15-16 & 19-21.

“... upon all flesh”

PART 4
SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS (II)

12. THE TRANSITION FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW

What was so unique about Pentecost? It has already been shown in paragraph 4.1 that, for Calvin, the answer to this question relates to the phrases “I will pour out” and “upon all flesh” in Acts 2:17. The first phrase has been analyzed in part 3 of this study. It is time to put the second of these phrases under the magnifying glass. “Upon all flesh” necessarily entails consideration of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God, their new relationship to the Jews, and the way in which this transition was achieved. Calvin attends to all these aspects. And this, in turn, has implications for his view on the church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles.

12.1. Breaking down the dividing wall: Ephesians 2:14

The phrase “upon all flesh” leads Calvin to a discussion of the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles.¹ The Jews were the first to become part of God’s family through the covenant, while the Gentiles were banished from his kingdom.² However, that situation has changed when the dividing wall was broken down (Eph. 2:14). Since the Lord has torn down the wall between them (Jews) and us (Gentiles), we now bear the name Christian, which is greater and more excellent than that of the house of Jacob. Now we are all members of one church.³

It turns out that Ephesians 2:14 and the surrounding verses, quoted twice in Calvin’s commentary on Acts 2, is not merely an ad hoc proof text, but an essential line of thought in his exposition of Acts. It is the verse most often quoted by Calvin in his commentary on Acts, and could therefore be considered a hermeneutical key to his understanding of this book.⁴ At least fourteen times he refers to or discusses this verse.⁵ In this passage in Ephesians 2 Paul speaks about the breaking down of the dividing wall, so that the Gentiles, who were once far

¹ For more on Calvin’s view on the Jews, see e.g. W. de Greef, *Van Één Stam. Calvijn over Joden en Christenen in de Context van de Late Middeleeuwen* (Delft: Uitgeverij Eburon, 2012); A. Detmers, ‘Calvin, the Jews, and Judaism’, in *Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in Sixteenth-century Germany* [Studies in Central European Histories, volume XXXVII], ed. D.P. Bell and S.G. Burnett (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2006), 197-217.

² Comm. on Acts 2:39, COR XII/1,85,5-9; see also Calvin’s commentary on Hebrews 6:17, COR II/XIX,102, where he refers to Acts 2:39 (the text of CO reads 2:29, but it is clearly a reference to 2:39) to show that the Jews are the first heirs, as well as his sermon on Galatians 1:22-2:2, CO 50,354, where he also refers to Acts 2:39 to show that the promises belonged to the Jews.

³ Serm. on Acts 2:36-38, SC 8,9,22-24; see also serm. on Acts 2:39-40, SC 8,31,20-24.

⁴ See W.H.Th. Moehn, ‘Calvin as Commentator on the Acts of the Apostles’, in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. D.K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 213 (and footnote 44). In comparison, Calvin not once refers to this verse or discusses it in the four polemical writings of the 1540’s.

⁵ Acts 1:8, 2:18, 2:39, 8:1, 8:27, 10:12, 10:28, 10:34, 11:1, 13:1 (twice), 13:2, 15:9, and 15:16.

off, could be made near through the blood of Christ.⁶ As could be expected, this verse functions specifically in key passages dealing with the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles, as well as with the commission to share the Gospel with the Gentiles.

In discussing this verse in his commentary on the book of Ephesians (published in 1548, one year before starting his work on the Acts of the Apostles) Calvin says that, if we want to understand Paul's meaning, we must note two things: that the Jews and the Gentiles were separated until a certain time, and that the ceremonies of the law had been signs (*symbola*) of this separation.⁷

In the first place, therefore, the Jews were separated from the Gentiles until a certain time.⁸ The Jews were the first to be joined to God by reason of the covenant and so became part of his family and household.⁹ For a certain period the church had been restricted to the Jews, so that during that period only they received the titles of servants and handmaidens of God (*servi et ancillae Dei*).¹⁰ The covenant of eternal life was made especially with the Jews¹¹; only they, the seed of Abraham, were the sacred heritage of God.¹² The Gentiles, on the other hand, were distant and separated from God.¹³ They were banished (*exulabant*) from his kingdom.¹⁴ Therefore Calvin, on several occasions, can call the Gentiles 'outsiders' (*extranei*) or 'strangers' (*alieni*), even considering himself to have been one.¹⁵

Secondly, Calvin wants his readers to note that the ceremonies of the law had been the visible signs of this separation. With a reference to Deuteronomy 32:8 Calvin proves that the separation was God's intention. Interestingly, in four different, though relevant, writings he uses the same reference to Deuteronomy 32 – namely, in his commentary on Ephesians 2:14,

⁶ When Calvin speaks about the 'wall' of Ephesians 2:14, he alternates between the terms *maceria* and *paries*. For 'breaking down' Calvin predominantly uses the verb *diruo*.

⁷ Comm. on Ephesians 2:14, COR II/XVI,191.

⁸ See Calvin's explicit mentioning of this separation in his commentary on Acts 1:8, COR XII/1,28,10; comm. on Acts 8:1, COR XII/1,231,21; comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,14; comm. on Acts 15:9, COR XII/2,37,15; comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,51,2.

⁹ Comm. on Acts 2:39, COR XII/1,85,7-9.

¹⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:18, COR XII/1,59,10-11.

¹¹ Comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,12-13.

¹² Comm. on Acts 10:34, COR XII/1,317,9.

¹³ Comm. on Acts 1:8, COR XII/1,28,10.

¹⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:39, COR XII/1,85,7-9. Calvin conveys the same thought in his comm. on Acts 10:34, COR XII/1,317,9-10 and on Acts 13:2, COR XII/1,364,21-22; in this case he uses the words *extraneae fuerant*. See also Inst. 2.11.11, CO 2,337.

¹⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:39, COR XII/1,85,10; comm. on Acts 10:28, COR XII/1,312,33-34; comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,13-14; comm. on Acts 15:9, COR XII/2,37,17. See also comm. on Ephesians 2:14, COR II/XVI,191.

in a sermon on Ephesians 2:13-15, in chapter 11.11 of book 2 of the Institutes (where Calvin speaks about the differences between the Old and the New Testament), and in his commentary on Acts 10:12.¹⁶ Calvin understands Deuteronomy 32:8 to mean that God had put up the boundaries of the nations in order to keep the line of Abraham separated from the rest of the world.

The boundaries of Deuteronomy 32 are, for Calvin, identical to the wall of separation of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 2:14. He compares both to a fold in which a flock of sheep is kept or a shed in which to keep cattle.¹⁷ In similar fashion God had a fold in which he kept his people, and the ceremonies of the law were like the walls of that fold.¹⁸ In his commentary on Acts 11:1 Calvin asks and answers the question: What was the purpose of the Law, except to be a middle wall (*medius esset paries*) to signify the division?¹⁹ The ceremonies of the law, therefore, had the purpose of showing the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. Circumcision, sacrifices, washings and abstaining from certain food were symbols of sanctification, reminding the Jews that their lot was different from that of other nations.²⁰

However, this situation was always intended to be temporary.²¹ Calvin already anticipates this when he says that Jews and Gentiles were separated until a certain time (*ad certum tempus*).²² In his sermon on Ephesians 2:13-15 he says that, although the Jews knew themselves to be God's children, nevertheless the matter hung in suspense until the coming of Jesus Christ.²³ And though the ceremonies and types of the law were assurances of God's grace towards the Jews, it would have been a tragedy had they stayed in them. They had to come to Jesus Christ.²⁴ Clearly the division was supposed to end at some point. Christ, therefore, began with the Jews, but afterwards he passed to Gentiles too.²⁵

¹⁶ Comm. on Ephesians 2:14, COR II/XVI,191; sermon on Ephesians 2:13-15, CO 51,405-406; Inst. 2.11.11, CO 2,337; comm. on Acts 10:12, COR XII/1,302,27-30.

¹⁷ Serm. on Ephesians 2:13-15, CO 51,405; see also Calvin's exposition of Genesis 17:7, CO 23,237.

¹⁸ Serm. on Ephesians 2:13-15, CO 51,406; comm. on Ephesians 2:14, COR II/XVI,191. In light of the image of the sheepfold, it is significant that Calvin says in his *Argumentum* that, through the preaching of the apostles about the unique Shepherd, it was Christ's purpose that all who had previously been wandering and scattered (i.e. the Gentiles – HHvA) might come together into the one sheepfold (*in unum ovile*), COR XII/1,11,30-31 & 12,1.

¹⁹ Comm. on Acts 11:1, COR XII/1,332,7-8.

²⁰ Comm. on Ephesians 2:14, COR II/XVI,192.

²¹ Comm. on Acts 10:12, COR XII/1,303,18-19.

²² Comm. on Ephesians 2:14, COR II/XVI,191.

²³ Serm. on Ephesians 2:13-15, CO 51,401; see for a similar expression Calvin's commentary on Acts 13:32, COR XII/1,387,6-8.

²⁴ Serm. on Ephesians 2:13-15, CO 51,401.

²⁵ Comm. on Acts 3:26, COR XII/1,115,2-3; see on the same verse COR XII/1,114,13-14, where Calvin says that Christ came with the purpose of blessing the Jews first, and then also us (*nobis*).

When the fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4), the wall, which restricted God's mercy to Israel, was finally broken down.²⁶ This refers to the coming of Christ.²⁷ In him the abolishment of the ceremonies was accomplished, because he is the truth and very substance of the ceremonies.²⁸ The middle wall (*medius paries*) by which the Jews and the Gentiles had been separated from each other under the Law (*sub Lege*), had fallen down.²⁹ In his commentary on Acts 8:27 Calvin says that Christ scattered the shadows of the law by the splendor of his coming³⁰, and therefore the reformer can speak of Christ in similar contexts as the sun of righteousness.³¹ Christ has joined circumcision and uncircumcision, so that both the members of the household and outsiders may be one in him, and form one church.³²

Calvin is clear that Christ has brought the Gentiles, who were strangers, near to God; he has broken down the dividing wall and reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to the Father.³³ He did so through the abolishment of the ceremonies of the Law. That, for Calvin, was the key in opening the kingdom of heaven to us (*nobis*).³⁴ From these last words one can see that Calvin, as he so often does in his writings, bridges the gap between biblical times and his own time. He has no problem considering himself and his readers as being part of those who were formerly outsiders and strangers³⁵, but similarly he has no difficulty applying the work of Christ in opening the kingdom of heaven to himself and his readers. Through Christ an entrance into the church had been opened for us.³⁶

The result of this work of Jesus Christ is equality for all in the church, something on which Calvin puts significant emphasis. Although equality (*aequalitas*) was intolerable to the Jewish Christians in Acts 11, due to their ambition and pride, Calvin shows that the prophets

²⁶ Inst. 2.11.11, CO 2,337; see also Calvin's only reference to Galatians 4:4 in his commentary on Acts 14:16, COR XII/2,15,6-7. For the use of Galatians 3 and 4, see also W. de Greef, *Calvijn en het Oude Testament* (Groningen: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1984), 117-119, 139-141, and 216-217.

²⁷ In several places in his commentary on Acts, Calvin links the coming of Christ to the breaking down of the dividing wall – see comm. on Acts 2:39, 8:27, 10:34, 11:1 and 13:1.

²⁸ Sermon on Ephesians 2:13-15, CO 51,406.

²⁹ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,51,1-2.

³⁰ Comm. on Acts 8:27, COR XII/1,252,30; see also sermon on Ephesians 2:13-15, where Calvin says that Jesus came to put away all those shadows.

³¹ Inst. 2.11.5, CO 2,333; sermon on Ephesians 2:13-15, CO 51,406.

³² Comm. on Acts 15:9, COR XII/2,37,15-17; see W. de Greef, *Calvijn en het Oude Testament*, 197-198.

³³ Comm. on Acts 2:39, COR XII/1,85,11-13.

³⁴ Sermon on Ephesians 2:13-15, CO 51,407; see for the same expression the comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,11.

³⁵ Comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,12-14.

³⁶ Comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,15-16.

everywhere foretold this.³⁷ Jews and Gentiles are engrafted into one body³⁸, united (*coalescant*) into God's holy people³⁹, where the covenant of life and salvation is now equally common (*partier commune est*) to both.⁴⁰ They are sharers (*participi*) in the same salvation⁴¹, and they share in the same covenant on equal terms (*peraeque*).⁴² God places the Gentiles on the same level of honor as the Jews, for they are all made equal in honor (*omnes inter se honore aequari*).⁴³ Those who were far off and those who were near are equally (*pariter*) reconciled to God, and they may grow together equally (*pariter*) into the one body.⁴⁴ All those who are received into the fellowship of the covenant are called by the same name (*eodem nomine censentur*).⁴⁵ Without denying the special position of Israel, Calvin nonetheless views the acceptance of the Gentiles in the church as an acceptance on the basis of equality. In a similar fashion Thomas de Vio Cajetan acknowledges the order of Jews and Gentiles. In his commentary on Acts 17:12 he says that the Gentiles are introduced in the fitting order, as first the Jews are described, and then the Gentiles.⁴⁶ But he nonetheless maintains that in the period between Christ's first and second comings there is "no distinction between Jew and Gentile".⁴⁷

12.2. Step by step

However, despite Jesus Christ in principal establishing the one body of his church, consisting equally of Jews and Gentiles, Calvin is aware that in practice this new situation was only achieved gradually.⁴⁸ Gradually the boundaries to the Gentiles had to be crossed, and gradually the ceremonies of the law had to be abrogated – as shown above, these were the two aspects that Calvin deemed important for understanding Paul's meaning in Ephesians 2:14. This dual gradual transition needs to be explored some more.

The first transition is the gradual crossing of the boundaries. In this regard it is important to see how Calvin, in his commentary on Acts, builds his argument just as gradually as the matter

³⁷ Comm. on Acts 11:1, COR XII/1,331,26-31.

³⁸ Comm. on Acts 1:8, COR XII/1,28,12-13; comm. on Acts 10:12, COR XII/1,303,10-11; comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,25-26; comm. on Acts 15:9, COR XII/2,37,15-16.

³⁹ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,50,36.

⁴⁰ Comm. on Acts 10:28, COR XII/1,312,33-34; comm. on Acts 10:34, COR XII/1,317,10-12.

⁴¹ Comm. on Acts 10:12, COR XII/1,303,10.

⁴² Comm. on Acts 10:34, COR XII/1,317,10-12.

⁴³ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,50,11-12, 16-17.

⁴⁴ Comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,24-26.

⁴⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:18, COR XII/1,59,13.

⁴⁶ Acts 17:12, TdVC, 465.

⁴⁷ Acts 2:21, TdVC, 436.

⁴⁸ H. Feld, ed., *Commentariorum in Acta Apostolorum*, COR XII/1 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2001), XXXV.

he is dealing with. When talking about the eunuch from Ethiopia and other foreign worshippers of the true God, Calvin describes them as preludes to the calling of the Gentiles (*haec erant vocationis gentium praeludia*), and some of them were present even before Christ came to destroy the dividing wall.⁴⁹ These were the first tiny steps in crossing the boundaries to the Gentiles. Subsequently, following Christ's order in Acts 1:8 (Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria and the ends of the earth), Calvin deems Samaria as an important next step in opening the church to the Gentiles. He sees the scattering of believers throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria in Acts 8:1, which resulted from the persecution after Stephen's death, as the beginning of the demolishing of the middle wall that was separating the Jews from the Gentiles (*ita dirui coepit medius paries*). The conversion of Samaria was similar to the firstfruits (*primitiae*) of the calling of the Gentiles.⁵⁰

A very important next step is Peter's vision in Acts 10. Peter, says Calvin, would never have dared to open the gate of heaven to the Gentiles, unless God himself had removed the wall (*maceria*).⁵¹ Therefore, God shows him that the legal distinction between clean and unclean had been abolished, and from this Peter may deduce that the wall, which stood between Jews and Gentiles, had now been destroyed.⁵² In reaction to the objection that Peter was taught about this matter before and therefore should have been able to act earlier, Calvin says that this matter was so new and strange that the apostles could not get used to it all at once (*ut non statim assuescere potuerint*). They knew the prophecies of the Old Testament and they were aware of Christ's command to preach to the Gentiles, but when they were required to bring it into practice, they hesitated.⁵³ It seems, therefore, that the novelty of this matter to the Jewish believers was, for Calvin, the reason why the crossing of the boundaries to the Gentiles was achieved only gradually.

Finally, a decisive step in crossing the boundaries to the Gentiles is Paul's ordination as teacher of the Gentiles (*Gentium doctor*). His calling was, as it were, the key by which God has opened the kingdom of Heaven to us. The dividing wall is now destroyed (*nunc ergo diruitur maceria*). Calvin calls on his readers to consider Paul's calling just as significant as if God openly proclaimed from heaven that the salvation promised to Abraham and his seed belongs to us today (*non minus hodie ad nos pertinere*).⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 8:27, COR XII/1,252,29-30.

⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 8:1, COR XII/1,231,21-22.

⁵¹ Comm. on Acts 10:12, COR XII/1,303,11-13.

⁵² Comm. on Acts 10:12, COR XII/1,303,6-9.

⁵³ Comm. on Acts 10:12, COR XII/1,303,22-30; see also W. de Greef, *Van Één Stam*, 89-90.

⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 13:1, COR XII/1,361,9-29; see also W.H.Th. Moehn, 'Calvin as Commentator on the Acts of the Apostles', 213-214.

The same gradual implementation applies to the abrogation of the ceremonies of the law, the second important aspect in understanding Paul's meaning of the breaking down of the middle wall in Ephesians 2:14. When commenting on the washing of the body of Tabitha in Acts 9:37, a ritual Calvin deems to be part of the old covenant, he says that even though the necessity for it was abolished, its use was still permitted during the first days of the Gospel until it would fall into disuse with the passing of time.⁵⁵ Likewise, commenting on James' speech in Acts 15, Calvin understands the apostle's words to mean that it was not possible for the ceremonies to be abolished so quickly, for the Jews had been used to the teaching of the law for many generations. The ceremonies had to be allowed for a short time (*ad breve tempus*), until the freedom in Christ was gradually (*paulatim*) better understood.

In order to proof his point, Calvin cites a common saying (*vulgarium proverbium*) from Augustine: the old ceremonies had to be buried with some honor.⁵⁶ Shortly afterwards, in his commentary on Acts 16:3, Calvin cites the same saying with a small, but significant, change. Here he says that the synagogue had to be buried with honor.⁵⁷ The ceremonies as well as the synagogue, both referring to the same reality of the administration under the old covenant, had to be buried. In this process of burying Calvin distinguishes three stages (*atque hic tres gradus notandi sunt*): firstly, Christ abrogated the ceremonies of the law so that they were not required to be kept anymore; secondly, their use was free until the truth of the Gospel would become more clearly known; finally, if they were being used, it had to be for the purpose of edification and not out of superstition.⁵⁸ From this Calvin draws the general principle (*hoc quidem generale est*) that the complete worship of the law came to an end at the advent of Christ, as far as faith and conscience were concerned. But with regards to its use, it was left in the freedom of the godly, providing it did not go against the confession of faith. And this was only for a short period of time, until the clear manifestation of the Gospel.⁵⁹

It is clear that Calvin sees the transition from the Jewish synagogue, with its observance of the ceremonies of the law, to the church of Christ consisting of Jews and Gentiles as a gradual process. The work of Christ has been completed, but the implementation takes time. As was seen however, Calvin identifies clear parameters for this process to ensure that the transition

⁵⁵ Comm. on Acts 9:37, COR XII/1,288,13-14.

⁵⁶ Comm. on Acts 15:21, COR XII/2,55,5-10.

⁵⁷ Comm. on Acts 16:3, COR XII/2,68,16-17; see Augustine, Ep. 82, CSEL 34/II,373 for the origin of this saying.

⁵⁸ Comm. on Acts 16:3, COR XII/2,67,31-68,3.

⁵⁹ Comm. on Acts 16:3, COR XII/2,68,8-13.

does in fact take place. For Calvin the synagogue with all its ceremonies eventually needed to be buried.

12.3. Synagogue, Israel and church

The synagogue was, however, not buried as it should have been, and this reality becomes an important line of thought in Calvin's commentary on Acts.⁶⁰ Due to the fact that not all completed the transition from the Jewish synagogue to the church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, Calvin starts viewing the synagogue more and more as an opposing force. The gradual transition allowed by Calvin, as was seen in the previous paragraph, also translates itself in an increasing negativity towards the synagogue and its leaders. It is true that the Genevan reformer sometimes speaks in a neutral way about the synagogue⁶¹ and initially even seems to accept the Jewish Council as the lawful and orderly government and therefore representing the church.⁶² However, these pastors of the church were becoming enemies of God and of the Gospel more and more.⁶³ Increasingly the synagogue and its leaders become the negative embodiment of those Jews who do not except that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and who keep up the dividing wall by maintaining the ceremonies of the law. The unburied synagogue, represented primarily by the Sadducees whom Calvin calls a sect (*secta*), gradually becomes the false church from which God separates his faithful church.⁶⁴ And the apostles, in professing themselves to be the servants of Christ, felt compelled to declare war upon the synagogue.⁶⁵

To be sure, in his commentary on Acts Calvin keeps considering the Jews to be the firstborn in the family of God.⁶⁶ Before the coming of Christ they were not merely the first, but they were the only ones, with the Gentiles being passed over. And after the coming of Christ, it was the proper order for the apostles to gather the church first from the Jews and then from the Gentiles. The Jews would always have the right of the firstborn and be pre-eminent in the

⁶⁰ W.H.Th. Moehn, 'Calvin as Commentator on the Acts of the Apostles', 209.

⁶¹ See e.g. comm. on Acts 18:7, COR XII/2,138,19-22.

⁶² Comm. on Acts 4:19, COR XII/1,125,31 & 126,3; comm. on Acts 7:2, COR XII/1,176,35-36.

⁶³ Comm. on Acts 4:19, COR XII/1,126,1; comm. on Acts 7:2, COR XII/1,176,34.

⁶⁴ Comm. on Acts 5:17, COR XII/1,147,23-25; see also comm. on Acts 9:26, COR XII/1,280,31-33, where Paul's humbleness is compared to the chief offices in corrupt and apostate synagogues (*in corruptis et apostaticis synagogis*).

⁶⁵ *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,520.

⁶⁶ Comm. on Acts 13:26, COR XII/1,381,19-25; for more on the position of Jews and Gentiles in the Israel of God, see W. de Greef, *Van Één Stam*, 98-106.

church of God.⁶⁷ However, when the Jews did not believe in Jesus Christ, the Gentiles took their places, and the unbelieving Jews became the symbol of the false church. The gradual separation that Calvin's view therefore reflects is a separation between the synagogue and the church, between the unbelieving Jews and the church, and not so much between Israel and the church.

For Calvin there is no discontinuity between Israel and the church. The church is Israel, of which the offspring of Abraham is an integral part.⁶⁸ This principle is worked out most extensively in his commentary on Paul's speech in Acts 13:33, where Calvin takes up the cause of the natural offspring of Abraham.⁶⁹ He calls those people fanatics, who think that only faith and not descent makes children of Abraham. In his view, those who are born children of Abraham according to the flesh should also be regarded spiritual children of God, unless they cut themselves off by their own unfaithfulness. Here Calvin uses the well known Pauline image of the root and the branches from Romans 11. The Israelite branches are holy by nature, seeing that they come from a holy root, unless they are polluted by their own fault. This does not mean, as some seem to conclude, that God's grace is bound to the carnal seed, because many of Abraham's descendants were lost through unbelief. Rather, this is what Calvin calls the twofold election (*duplex electio*), the first being the common election of the whole nation and the second being the limited election that is finally confirmed by faith. Calvin, therefore, would not disagree with the primacy of faith (*per fidem vero Deus suos segregat*)⁷⁰, but this primacy does not annul the privileged position of Israel. Israel retains its pre-eminent position.

Calvin, however, reminds his readers that Israel's pre-eminent position is not an exclusive position, for even if the whole of the people of Israel would have continued in the faith the Gentiles would still have been added to their fellowship. The grace of Christ cannot be prevented from spreading throughout the whole world. Calvin's view gives both the privileged position of Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles their proper place. This view is essentially based on the unity and continuity that the reformer sees between the old and the new covenant.⁷¹ Twice, therefore, Calvin can call the church the Israel of God (*Dei Israel*),

⁶⁷ Comm. on Acts 13:46, COR XII/1,401,32-33 & 402,5-8.

⁶⁸ F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody: the Church, a History of Divine Protection* [Reformed Historical Theology, volume 12] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 96-97.

⁶⁹ For this paragraph, see comm. on Acts 13:33, COR XII/1,387,16-32 & 388,6-12.

⁷⁰ Comm. on Acts 13:33, COR XII/1,387,30.

⁷¹ A. Detmers, 'Calvin, the Jews, and Judaism', 197-217; see also J.M.J. Lange van Ravenswaay, 'Calvin and the Jews', in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 144; R.C. Zachman, *Reconsidering John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63.

consisting of Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ, gathered out of every nation of the world since Pentecost⁷², with its members being the true Israelites.⁷³

But the synagogue, being distinct from the Israel of God (the true church), becomes the representative of the false church who rejects the preaching of Jesus Christ. That this is, indeed, Calvin's view of the synagogue is seen when, in his aforementioned commentary on Acts 4:19 and 7:2, he applies his negative view of the synagogue to the Papists of his own day, whom he certainly saw as the false church.⁷⁴ This becomes most apparent in the dedicatory letters to the commentary on Acts, where he calls the Roman church the synagogue of the pope (*synagoga Papali*), one of only a handful of times in his oeuvre that Calvin uses this expression.⁷⁵ In the book of Acts, which depicts the transition from the synagogue to the church and the eventual confrontation between these two, it is not insignificant that Calvin describes the Roman Catholic Church with this phrase. In this way he is able to establish a double antithesis: between the synagogue and the early church (the true Israel) in Acts, and analogically between the Roman church and the newly reformed church of his own day.⁷⁶

Despite this important theological line of thinking, Calvin nonetheless acknowledges Paul's normal missionary practice of starting his preaching in the synagogue wherever there was one, to offer Christ to his own nation.⁷⁷ No matter if the apostles were only recently persecuted by the Jews, they still went to the synagogue.⁷⁸ In Corinth Paul even chooses his lodging close to the synagogue "in order to spur on the Jews more readily".⁷⁹ And after Paul had shaken out his garments at Corinth as a sign of cursing, he again went to the synagogue in the next city, Ephesus. Calvin comments that Paul, with the sign of cursing, did not cast the whole nation aside, but only those whom he has already experienced to be of incorrigible obstinacy. Therefore he makes a fresh start in Ephesus to see whether he would find greater obedience

⁷² Comm. on Acts 1:15, COR XII/1,37,6-8; see also comm. on Acts 13:46, COR XII/1,403,5-6.

⁷³ Comm. on Acts 13:16, COR XII/1,376,8-9.

⁷⁴ See the discussion in paragraph 1.2.5, subheading 'the church'. There are other places where Calvin speaks about the 'synagogue(s) of the devil', see e.g. *Confession de la foy* 1536, CO 9, 698; sermon on Deuteronomy 5, CO 26,374; sermon on Job 33, CO 35,95; sermon on Psalm 109, CO 32,601; sermon on 1 Timothy 3:1-4, CO 53,262; sermon on Titus 1:7-9, CO 54,445. This expression almost always occurs in a discussion about the Papists.

⁷⁵ Letter to Christian III, COR XII/1,LXVII, and repeated in the letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,10,16. See the foreword to the first edition of the Gallican Confession, CO 9,734 & 738; *De Scandalis*, CO 8,60; and Calvin's commentary on the Gospel of John, COR II/XI,2,15, for similar expressions. In his sermon on Acts 2:41-42, SC 8,41,2 & 12, Calvin speaks about the Roman church as a synagogue of Satan (*sinagogue de Sathan*) and as the synagogue of the pope (*en la sinagogue du pape*).

⁷⁶ See Inst. 4.2.3 for Calvin's discussion of the similarity between the Jews and the Roman church.

⁷⁷ Comm. on Acts 17:17, COR XII/2,109,26-28.

⁷⁸ Comm. on Acts 14:1, COR XII/2,3,24-27.

⁷⁹ Comm. on Acts 18:7, COR XII/2,138,20-22.

among them.⁸⁰ A little further Calvin says that Paul entered the synagogue in Ephesus with the purpose of gathering into the one body of the church those Jews who had not yet accepted Christ.⁸¹

From the above it can be concluded that, for Calvin, the synagogue gradually becomes the residing place of the unbelieving Jews, and eventually the symbol of the false church, comparable to the Roman church of his own day. However, there are still elect individuals among them, and therefore they are not completely lost as a nation. Within the synagogue Calvin still sees a remnant of the church.⁸² This remnant needs to be brought to Christ and, together with the believing Gentiles, form the one church, the true Israel. This has a direct bearing on Paul's *modus operandi* in the cities where he came during his missionary journeys.

12.4. Restoration of the church

As has already been stated, Calvin sees no discontinuity between Israel and the church of the new covenant. The church is Israel, consisting of Jews and Gentiles. However, this continuity with the church of the old covenant, based on the essential unity of the covenants, necessitates an important concept in Calvin's thinking, viz. the concept of restoration.⁸³ In his commentary on Acts 2:17 Calvin justifies the necessity for this concept by the fact that the church of the old covenant at that time was lying in ruins (*quae tunc collapsa erat*).⁸⁴ And in his commentary

⁸⁰ Comm. on Acts 18:19, COR XII/2,146,11-15.

⁸¹ Comm. on Acts 19:8, COR XII/2,157,17-20.

⁸² R.C. Zachman, *Reconsidering John Calvin*, 73.

⁸³ See Calvin's powerful comment on Acts 10:36, COR XII/1,319,16-19, where he says that Peter speaks about the restoration of the church, which was dependent on the eternal covenant of God. The concept of restoration is discussed in terms of its soteriological use in the Institutes by B.G. Armstrong, 'The Concept of Restoration/Restitution in Calvin', in *Calvinus Servus Christi: Die Referate des Internationalen Kongresses für Calvinforschung vom 25. bis 28. August 1986 in Debrecen*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Budapest: Presseabteilung des Raday Kollegiums, 1988), 143-150. De Boer investigates its use in the prophet Ezekiel, in E.A. de Boer, *John Calvin on the Visions of Ezekiel. Historical and Hermeneutical Studies in John Calvin's 'Sermon Inédits', Especially on Ezek. 36-48* [Kerkhistorische Bijdragen, volume 21] (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2004), 179-198. Wilcox has done important research on the use of this concept in the prophets, in P.J. Wilcox, *Restoration, Reformation and the Progress of the Kingdom of Christ: Evangelisation in the Thought and Practice of John Calvin, 1555-1564* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1993); P.J. Wilcox, 'The Restoration of the Church in Calvin's Commentaries in Isaiah the Prophet', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 85 (1994): 68-95. See also F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 37 (footnote 108) and 111-112. For a general overview of the concepts of *reformatio* and *renovatio* see G. Strauss, 'Ideas of *reformatio* and *renovatio* from the Middle Ages to the Reformation', in *Handbook of European History 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation. Volume II: Visions, Programs and Outcomes*, ed. T.A. Brady jr., H.A. Oberman and J.D. Tracy (Leiden / New York / Köln: E.J. Brill, 1995), 1-30.

⁸⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,55,21-22; for similar expressions, see *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,394; *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,636-637. In confrontation with the Papists Calvin even speaks of the corrupt condition (*et ad rectam evangelii normam corruptissimum eius statum emendari*) of the church, *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,529.

on Acts 15:16, Calvin, again in the context of using the concept of restoration, says that the tabernacle of David had fallen into ruins (*collapsum tabernaculum*), that it was a house that had collapsed (*quae collapsa erat*), and that David's kingdom was reduced to nothing (*in nihilo redactum*).⁸⁵ A similar image can be found in Erasmus, when he says that the current state of the church is one of turbulence and corruption (*turbulentissimum & corruptissimum*).⁸⁶ In order to deal with this ruinous reality, while still maintaining the unity and continuity of the covenant and the church, Calvin utilizes the concept of restoration, thereby showing awareness of the fact that the church of the old covenant – also referred to as the kingdom (of David)⁸⁷ – was in a very bad state. There was not much left of the church of the old covenant. If there was to be any continuity between Israel and the church, between the kingdom of the old and the kingdom of the new covenant, it was dependent on a restoration. Calvin repeatedly shows that this restoration was, in fact, promised by the prophets and hoped for by the Jews.⁸⁸ After quoting one of these prophets, Isaiah 11:1, Calvin reminds his readers that, when God restores the church, he builds it out of ruins (*ex ruinis aedificet*).⁸⁹ This means, according to his own definition of 'restoration' in Acts 1:6, "to set up again that which was broken down and disfigured by many ruins."⁹⁰ This definition can in general be applied to all the instances where he uses this concept with reference to the church.

In his commentary on Acts Calvin's use of the concept of restoration has different facets, much of which confirms the research already done by B.G. Armstrong and P.J. Wilcox.⁹¹ However, before the different facets are studied in more depth, some general remarks are appropriate. The words most often used by Calvin in his commentary to convey the concept of restoration, are *restitutio* (35 times) and *instauratio* (20 times), and to a lesser degree *renovatio* (17 times). These terms are so fluid that they often overlap in their meaning.⁹² On the contrary, the word *reformatio* is only used twice, once referring to the reformation of believers whereby we are

⁸⁵ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,50,18-29 & 51,10.

⁸⁶ LB VII, 651-652.

⁸⁷ Calvin does not really distinguish between church and kingdom; see for similar observations F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 109; P.J. Wilcox, *Restoration, Reformation and the Progress of the Kingdom of Christ*, 113.

⁸⁸ For Calvin's references to restoration as something promised before, see comm. on Acts 1:6, COR XII/1,25,1-2; comm. on Acts 5:12, COR XII/1,144,19-20; comm. on Acts 10:36, COR XII/1,319,13-15; comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,50,18-19; comm. on Acts 19:8, COR XII/2,157,23-25.

⁸⁹ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,51,23-24.

⁹⁰ Comm. on Acts 1:6, COR XII/1,25,9-11; see also Calvin's comm. on Acts 7:6, COR XII/1,181,14, where he says that the people were wonderfully restored, as if from death to life (*a morte in vitam restituitur*).

⁹¹ See footnote 83 in this chapter.

⁹² P.J. Wilcox, 'The Restoration of the Church in Calvin's Commentaries in Isaiah the Prophet', 76.

made new creatures⁹³, and once referring to the civil improvements introduced by Felix.⁹⁴ Therefore the notion set forth by certain scholars, namely that the Magisterial Reformers primarily worked with the idea of *reformatio* while the Radical Reformers primarily worked with the slogan of *restitutio*⁹⁵, is highly doubtful merely by looking at the numbers.⁹⁶ In his commentary on Acts, and this also seems to be true for his commentary on Isaiah⁹⁷, Calvin clearly prefers words like *restitutio* and *instauratio* above *reformatio*.

The numbers can, however, be further refined by trying to identify Calvin's use of these words. Following the tentative suggestions by Armstrong, later refined by Wilcox, the following three categories can be identified: 1) the restoration of humans and human faculties, 2) the restoration of the church and the kingdom as well as certain ecclesial institutions, and 3) the restoration of the world and 'all things'.⁹⁸ In the rest of this paragraph the focus will be on the second and third uses.

The first, and most important, aspect that emerges from Calvin's use of the concept of restoration of the church is that it is a joint venture between Christ and the Spirit.⁹⁹ What is most striking when one tries to identify the respective roles of Christ and the Spirit in this process, is that Calvin never applies the restoration of "all things" or "the world" – the third category identified above – to the Spirit. This all-inclusive and over-arching task Calvin, it seems, reserves for Christ. He says in his commentary on Acts 5:31, that when God wanted to

⁹³ Comm. on Acts 5:31, COR XII/1,155,4. In his sermons on Acts Calvin uses the French words *reformation* and *reformez* quite often – see e.g. sermon on Acts 5:13-16, SC 8,146,1-15; sermon on Acts 7:8-9, SC 8,261,7-19; sermon on Acts 7:55-58, SC 8,398,31-36 – but mostly to rebuke his listeners for not living according to the principles of the Genevan reformation; see D.F. Wright, 'Calvin's Commentary and Sermons on Acts 1-7: A Comparison', in *Calvin, Beza and Later Calvinism: Papers Presented at the 15th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society*, ed. D. Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 295.

⁹⁴ Comm. on Acts 24:2, COR XII/2,249,23.

⁹⁵ See for this notion F.H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church. An Introduction to Sectarian Protestantism* [Studies in Church History, vol. VIII] (American Society of Church History, 1952), 74; G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), xxvi; J. Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978), 145.

⁹⁶ This commonly accepted distinction has already been proven unfounded by B.G. Armstrong, 'The Concept of Restoration/Restitution in Calvin', 143-150. W.J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 241 (footnote 45), refers to an unpublished paper by M.H. Rienstra in which the latter indicates that at least as late as 1543 Calvin preferred *restitutio* to *reformatio*, but that this might have changed in later years due to pressure from the Anabaptists. The fact that Calvin prefers *restitutio* and *instauratio* to *reformatio* in his commentary on Acts (published in 1552 and 1554, and republished in 1560) as well as in his commentary on Isaiah (published in 1559 as an almost completely new work after the publication of the first edition in 1551), shows that Rienstra made a valid point in showing Calvin's preference for *restitutio* above *reformatio*, but that his suggestion of a change in later years is unfounded.

⁹⁷ P.J. Wilcox, 'The Restoration of the Church in Calvin's Commentaries in Isaiah the Prophet', 75.

⁹⁸ B.G. Armstrong, 'The Concept of Restoration/Restitution in Calvin', 149-150; P.J. Wilcox, 'The Restoration of the Church in Calvin's Commentaries in Isaiah the Prophet', 71-75.

⁹⁹ See also *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,510: "The restoration of the church is the work of God..."

give hope to his people, he used to promise a prince or a king through whom he would restore (*restitueret*) all things (*omnia*), and in this passage the apostles testify that this honor has been given to Christ.¹⁰⁰ And the Jews accepted as a principle that God would send a Redeemer who would restore (*restitueret*) all things (*omnia*), this Redeemer being Christ.¹⁰¹ All the promises concerning the blessed and well-ordered state of the church would not have been fulfilled until Christ came to restore (*restitueret*) all things (*omnia*).¹⁰² In similar fashion Calvin can say that it was Christ's task to restore (*restitueret*) a ruined world (*mundus*) to life.¹⁰³ Apparently he uses "the world" and "all things" as referring to the same reality.

How exactly Calvin understood Christ's restoration of all things becomes clearer when a closer look is taken at his commentary on Acts 3:21, the only passage in the book of Acts that actually speaks about a restoration (*usque ad tempora restitutionis*).¹⁰⁴ Calvin says that Christ through his death has already restored all things (*omnia restituit*),¹⁰⁵ but this pertains only to the power and the cause (*ad vim et causam pertinent*) necessary to eventually achieve the full restoration. However, the effect of it cannot be fully seen yet, as the restoration is still in a process of completion. Then Calvin rather suddenly steps over from "all things" to "the kingdom of Christ" and applies the same principle. The kingdom of Christ has only just begun, but the perfection of it is deferred until the last day, so that the benefits of the kingdom are now only partly evident. But, says Calvin, Christ will one day come and restore all things (*omnia restituat*); Christ is responsible for the final restoration of all things (*ultima rerum omnium instauratio*). It seems that for Calvin Christ's role in the restoration process pertains specifically to the beginning (his death) and the end (his return), and therefore his role is of an all-inclusive, over-arching nature, pertaining to the totality (the world and all things). Through his death Christ in principle achieved the restoration of all things, and one day he will return to finalize the restoration of all things.

¹⁰⁰ Comm. on Acts 5:31, COR XII/1,154,20-22.

¹⁰¹ Comm. on Acts 9:20, COR XII/1,277,7-8.

¹⁰² Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,55,25-27; for similar combinations of "restoration" (*restitutio* and *instauratio*) and "all things" (*omnia*) see comm. on Acts 5:12, COR XII/1,144,17-19; comm. on Acts 13:16, COR XII/1,375,31-32; comm. on Acts 28:23, COR XII/2,311,21-22.

¹⁰³ Comm. on Acts 18:4, COR XII/2,136,20-21; for a restoration of the world, see also *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,26; comm. on Acts 15:9, COR XII/2,38,16-17.

¹⁰⁴ Comm. on Acts 3:21, COR XII/1,106,19-29 & 107,1-5. The Greek word used in Acts 3:21 is *apokatastasis*; for the history of interpretation of this passage, as well as the concept in general, see I.L.E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), in particular chapter 1.

¹⁰⁵ See also his commentary on Acts 8:32, COR XII/1,256,9-11, where it is said of Christ that, in order for him to redeem the church and restore it to life (*restituat in vitam*), he must be so crushed that it seems that he was given up for lost.

The Spirit's role in the restoration seems to be more focused on the intermediate process itself. This applies in particular to the spiritual regeneration of man, where Calvin often refers to the work of the Spirit in the ongoing process of justification and sanctification. But it also applies to the restoration of the church. Whereas, for Calvin, Christ's work has more the nature of encompassing "all things" at the particular junctions of his death and final return, the Spirit's work focuses more on the application of Christ's work during the process of moving from provisional to final restoration. It is, therefore, instructive to read in his commentary on Acts 1:21 that when Peter appoints himself and his colleagues to be preachers of the resurrection, the specific reference to the resurrection is explained by Calvin, *inter alia*, as containing, on the one hand, the heavenly authority of Christ, and, on the other hand, the power of the Spirit in protecting his own, in establishing justice and equity, in restoring order, in abolishing the tyranny of sin, and in putting to flight all the enemies of the church (note the use of participles in this sentence).¹⁰⁶ This is the typical applicative role of the Spirit in the interim between the provisional and the final restoration. In similar vein Calvin has Peter accusing the Jews of dullness since, though they all hoped for a speedy restoration (*restitutio*), they did not have consideration for the means by which this would happen, *viz.* the outpouring of the Spirit, who is the key which opens the door for us to enter into all spiritual blessings and into the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁷ The church could only be restored (*instaurari*) by begin renewed (*renovarentur*) by the Spirit of God.¹⁰⁸ This is reminiscent of Calvin's statement in the *Argumentum* to his commentary, namely that the church only got its legitimate form once the power from above (*i.e.* the Spirit) descended on the apostles.¹⁰⁹

It seems a legitimate inference to say that Christ, after earning the restoration through his death and resurrection, sends his Spirit to effectuate this in the life of the church and the believers. In the end Christ will return to complete this restoration.

A second aspect in Calvin's use of the concept of restoration, which links to the previous paragraph (12.3), is the fact that the inclusion of the Gentiles in the one family of God is not merely an addendum, but an integral part of the process of restoration. In his commentary on Acts 15:16 Calvin says that in God's promise of restoration of the ruined tabernacle, the Gentiles are also allowed to be subject to the kingdom of David. They share a common God

¹⁰⁶ Comm. on Acts 1:21, COR XII/1,42,12-18; these words were omitted in the first edition of 1552 and 1554, and were only added for the edition of 1560.

¹⁰⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,56,1-4 & 20-22.

¹⁰⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,55,21-22 & 56,1-2.

¹⁰⁹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,28-30.

with the Jews and they are his one family.¹¹⁰ Shortly afterwards, and still in the same context, Calvin concludes that if the kingdom of Christ can only be established (*si aliter non potest constitui Christi regnum*) when God is called upon throughout the whole world and the Gentiles are united to his holy people, then it would be absurd to keep them back from the hope of salvation.¹¹¹ The breaking down of the dividing wall and the adding of the Gentiles (par. 12.1-12.3) are prerequisites in restoring the church and the kingdom of Jesus Christ on earth. It shows that, for Calvin, restoration is not only a return to an old order, but that it is also a progression to something new. The unity of the covenant ensures that the restored church is the same church, but the combined work of Christ and the Spirit also brings about something new, the inclusion of the Gentiles. Thomas de Vio Cajetan, with his characteristic use of the verb *euangelizare*, similarly thinks that it is through the work of evangelizing the Gentiles that God was restoring his church: “He begins to rebuild his ruins when he converts the Jews to the faith. And he erected that which is to be witnessed by the whole world when he gave the Holy Spirit to the apostles in order to evangelize the world.”¹¹²

Thirdly, notice should be taken of the fact that, for Calvin, restoration is very often a return to a better state.¹¹³ He ends his sermon on Acts 2:43-45 by calling on his listeners to ask our gracious God to restore things to their original condition.¹¹⁴ He frequently talks about it as a return to ‘order’.¹¹⁵ Calvin deems it a familiar doctrine to the Jews that the church could only return to a blessed and well-ordered state (*de beato et bene composito Ecclesiae statu*) when Christ through his coming would restore all things.¹¹⁶ The same message is conveyed in the commentary on Acts 15:16¹¹⁷ and in particular in Acts 28:23, where Calvin states that it was a generally accepted principle among the Jews that the Messiah would come to restore all things to the order of perfection (*qui omnia in perfectum ordinem restitueret*).¹¹⁸ What Calvin exactly means by the restoration of order, remains unclear from these passages.

A fourth aspect, which might give clarity to the previous aspect, is that the restoration of order in the church, inter alia, entails the restoration of certain institutions. Twice Calvin links

¹¹⁰ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,50,18-21.

¹¹¹ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,50,32-36.

¹¹² Acts 15:16, TdVC, 461.

¹¹³ Calvin says that the Papists would not allow the church to be restored to a better condition (*quam ecclesiam restitui in statum meliorem*), *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,529.

¹¹⁴ Sermon on Acts 2:43-45, SC 8,54,8-9.

¹¹⁵ Calvin also speaks of a restoration of the church to ‘true order’ (*Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,529), to its ‘proper state’ (*Admonitio paterna*, CO 7,266), and to its ‘true condition’ (*Admonitio paterna*, CO 7,269).

¹¹⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:17, COR XII/1,55,24-27.

¹¹⁷ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,51,10-12.

¹¹⁸ Comm. on Acts 28:23, COR XII/2,311,20-22.

restoration with ecclesial institutions. In his commentary on Acts 1:13 he explains that Luke records all the names of the disciples so that they may know that, after deserting Christ, they were restored (*restitutos*) to their former position.¹¹⁹ Here Calvin deals with a restoration of Christ's first office bearers. And in Acts 6:14 he mentions a restoration (*restituere*) of the Holy Supper to its pure and proper use as part of a longer list of biblical teachings and practices that has been attacked by certain unnamed people.¹²⁰ Thus, the restoration of order in the church would, at the very least, also entail a restoration of certain ecclesial institutions, like the offices and the sacraments.

A final aspect worth mentioning is Calvin's application of the restoration of the church in the time of Pentecost to his own time, calling upon believers to take the restoration of the church to hand. In this application Calvin shows that, even though restoration is a work of God, he uses the believers, in particular the worldly and ecclesial leaders, to execute it. This is, in fact, the main focus of his use of the concept of restoration in the polemical writings of the 1540's¹²¹, and it also applies to his commentary on the book of Acts. In a short ending to the letter to Nicolaus Radziwil, which does not appear in the original letters to Christian III and Frederick II, Calvin makes a reference to the bulls of the Council of Trent. He urges Radziwil to destroy these bulls and apply his mind more freely to the serious and renewed restoration (*restitutio*) of the church. For this endeavor Calvin wishes the prince the direction of the Holy Spirit.¹²² Restoration is, therefore, not a single action limited to the time of Acts, but it is part of the process between Christ's death and resurrection, and his return. The Spirit works it time and again, and human agents should constantly take up the task.

12.5. Conclusion

For Calvin the calling of the Gentiles, and the accompanying breaking down of the dividing wall, is one of the outstanding characteristics that distinguishes the Old from the New Testament. To state it more specific, the pouring out of the Spirit marks a decisive next step in

¹¹⁹ Comm. on Acts 1:13, COR XII/1,34,11-13.

¹²⁰ Comm. on Acts 6:14, COR XII/1,173,21-22.

¹²¹ See Calvin's address to Emperor Charles V in the opening of *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,453-454, where he humbly exhorts the emperor and the princes to undertake the task of restoring the church. In his *Admonitio paterna*, CO 7,266, he acknowledges that it is not everyone's business to restore the church, but subsequently insists that this right cannot be denied to Christian princes. Calvin calls on the pope to prove that the power of restoring the church is committed only to priests and not to kings. In his *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,636-637, Calvin acknowledges God's freedom to raise up prophets and other ministers to restore his ruined church.

¹²² Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,10,27-30 & 34-35.

fulfilling God's promise to Abraham that in him all the generations of the earth will be blessed. Although unacceptable to many Jews – and even difficult to grasp for many Jews who believed in Christ – this had been foretold by many predictions of the prophets. Pentecost means an outpouring of the Spirit of Christ, not only on the Jews, but on all flesh, Jews and Gentiles alike. The same Spirit of faith unites the Gentiles to the Jews and gathers them together into the one body of the church.¹²³ This is, for the reformer of Geneva, an important element in the restoration of the church. In fact, restoration cannot happen without the Gentiles. The church of the New Testament is inconceivable without the inclusion of the Gentiles. For Calvin this is a reality based on the prophecy of Scripture, but also a reality experienced in a very personal and existential way. The inclusion of the Gentiles is, after all, also the opening of the kingdom for himself and the believers of his day.

The coming of Christ and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit with the accompanying preaching by the apostles signals the last days, the period of the restoration of the church, which, at that time, was in ruins. One could therefore expect that Calvin gives a clear description of what the restored church should look like, and actually starts to look like in the age of the restoration by the Spirit. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

¹²³ Comm. on Acts 11:2, COR XII/1,332,14-15.

13. THE CHURCH

Just like the house of David in the old covenant, the building of the sixteenth century church was lying in ruins and needed restoration. Calvin praises his dedicatees for taking this task to hand, even considering one of them, Nicolaus Radziwil, deserving to have his name appear in the very edifice he was building, the spiritual building of the temple of Christ (*in spirituali templi Christi aedificio*).¹ The reason for the state of the church was that the Papists, like the Jewish leaders in the time of Jesus and the apostles, were boasting that they have the church, but in reality they have left the body of the church without a head. They have cut off the Head, Christ, and were left with nothing but a corpse. But despite this dire situation among the Papists, restoration was already taking place – the kingdom of Christ had been putting deeper and firmer roots in the kingdom of Denmark², and in the kingdom of Poland the kingdom of Christ had been advanced among many noblemen.³ Therefore, Calvin can call on his dedicatees to continue what they, or others before them, had already started.

13.1. Central motives

These introductory remarks, taken somewhat randomly from the respective dedicatory letters to the commentary on Acts, put the reader firmly in the ecclesial – and political – context of Calvin’s time, a context always to be kept in mind when reading his commentary. But these remarks also familiarize the reader with three central motives in Calvin’s view on the church in the book of Acts: the building, the body, and the kingdom. In his *Paraphrases* on Acts, Erasmus chooses for the image of the flock and the shepherd, an image that reflects his emphasis on peace and concord within the church. For Calvin, however, the motives of the building, the body, and the kingdom stand out when he, whether consciously or only in passing, talks about the church in his commentary on Acts.⁴ These motives are tailor-made for

¹ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,3,25-26.

² Letter to Frederick II, COR XII/1,LXIX.

³ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,6,30-33.

⁴ See also B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 188-189, who says that “Calvin’s doctrine of the church, then, is most fully expressed in the dialectic of these two concepts (kingdom and body – HHvA), grounded as they are in the correlation of the twofold work of the Holy Spirit.” Milner, therefore, also identifies the metaphors of the body and the kingdom as central to Calvin’s view of the church. Although these metaphors are both biblical and traditional, Milner says that Calvin’s use of them is grounded in the twofold office of Christ as King and Priest (164). Ch. Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville / London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 262ff, writes: “Calvin emphasizes Christ’s headship with both architectural and anatomical tropes.” See also E.-M. Faber, ‘Mutual Connectedness as a Gift and a Task: On John Calvin’s Understanding of the Church’, in *John Calvin’s Impact on Church and Society, 1509-2009*, ed. M.E. Hirzel and M. Sallmann (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 126-128.

the purpose he has for this particular commentary. Just as Calvin, in his commentary on the Minor Prophets, uses the divided kingdom of David as a lens through which he sees the brokenness of the ancient church in the church of his own time⁵, so the rebuilt house, the revived body and the restored kingdom are the lenses through which he sees the beginning of the church in the golden age of the apostles, and as it subsequently returns in the church of the sixteenth century.

13.1.1. Building and builders

Peter's reference to the stone (Ps 118:22) in Acts 4:11 offers Calvin the first opportunity to introduce the metaphor of a building (*metaphora aedificii*) to compare the church with, a metaphor he henceforth uses with regular intervals. He considers it to be a very suitable metaphor because both the church and individual believers are temples and houses of God.⁶ From the reformer's commentary several important elements of this metaphor emerge. Firstly there are the builders. Those who are in a position of government in the church are called the master builders (*architecti*). This title immediately gives an indication of their duty, namely to devote themselves to the building of the temple of God. Furthermore, the correct method of building is to keep Christ as the foundation (*fundamentum*), and to complete the whole building only from pure doctrine (*pura doctrina*).⁷ Christ, therefore, is the foundation of the church, a clear reference to the 'head of the corner' (*caput anguli*) in the preceding discussion of Acts 4:11, the stone that was rejected by the builders that becomes the principal stone on which the whole weight of the building rests.⁸ And the only acceptable building material for building on this foundation is the pure doctrine of Scripture. This is the reason why, when Paul speaks about 'his Gospel', Calvin is quick to say that Paul is not introducing a new Gospel, one that he himself has built (*cuius ipse sit architectus*), but that he is preaching only what Christ had committed to him.⁹

⁵ This is the suggestion of F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody: the Church, a History of Divine Protection* [Reformed Historical Theology, volume 12] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 109.

⁶ See comm. on Acts 4:11, COR XII/1,121,9-10, as well as comm. on Acts 9:31, COR XII/1,283,29-30.

⁷ Comm. on Acts 4:11, COR XII/1,121,10 & 122,1-5. In his sermon on Acts 4:5-12, SC 8,88,11-12, Calvin speaks about the priests as the master masons of God's spiritual building (*les maîtres massons de l'édifice spirituel de Dieu*).

⁸ Comm. on Acts 4:11, COR XII/1,121,11-12.

⁹ Comm. on Acts 15:28, COR XII/2,58,20-22.

Thus, Calvin is clear on the builders (the ministers), the foundation (Christ) and the building material (pure doctrine), and being a master builder himself he put this into practice in the church of Geneva. But as he experienced there, this does not make building easy. The building of the church is not an event, but a prolonged process, often hampered and interrupted by human sinfulness from the inside or attacks from outside.¹⁰ “The church is not so much an institution in history in which the restoration of order has been accomplished, as it is itself the history of that restoration”, as Benjamin Milner so aptly said in his work on Calvin’s doctrine of the church.¹¹ In his commentary on Acts Calvin gives ample testimony of this prolonged building process.

From the fact that the office of deacons was not instituted from the outset but was only added at a later stage, Calvin deducts that the church cannot be formed all at once. An edifice of such a massive size cannot be perfected on the first day so that nothing needs to be added afterwards.¹² The size of the edifice also makes this work too much for one person, so that many builders are needed who are all involved in different stages of the building process. As a result Calvin, on the one hand, can call Paul the master builder that laid the foundations of all the churches in Galatia and Phrygia; and although these churches certainly had their own pastors under whom they made progress, Paul would occasionally pass through to encourage them.¹³ And in Corinth it even took Paul, the most distinguished master builder (*praestantissimus architectus*), a year and a half to lay the foundation of the church there.¹⁴ On the other hand there were those who built on the already laid foundations. Barnabas was sent to Antioch to advance the rudiments of faith further, to arrange things in some form of order, and to give shape to an uncompleted building (*qui aedificio inchoato formam daret*).¹⁵ This continued work of edification (*aedificatio*), building up what has not yet been completed, returns very often and in different contexts throughout the commentary on Acts. The gifts of the Spirit are given for the edification of the church¹⁶; the decision to circumcise Timothy and not circumcise Titus was for the edification and well being of the church¹⁷; Paul’s decision to

¹⁰ This confirms Calvin’s dynamic ecclesiology, as discussed from his commentary on the Psalms by H.J. Selderhuis, ‘Church on Stage: Calvin’s Dynamic Ecclesiology’, in *Calvin and the Church. Papers presented at the 13th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society May 24-26, 2001*, ed. D. Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2002), 46-64.

¹¹ B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 47.

¹² Comm. on Acts 6:1, COR XII/1,162,28-29 & 163,1-2.

¹³ Comm. on Acts 18:22, COR XII/2,147,20-23.

¹⁴ Comm. on Acts 18:11, COR XII/2,141,29-31.

¹⁵ Comm. on Acts 11:22, COR XII/1,341,9-11.

¹⁶ Comm. on Acts 8:21, COR XII/1,246,22.

¹⁷ Comm. on Acts 16:3, COR XII/2,22 & 25.

hurry to Jerusalem was for the edification of the church, partly by reporting on the extension of the kingdom¹⁸; and ultimately everything God does through us that is praiseworthy, is for the edification of the church.¹⁹

As has been said, this is a task for many workers. The building of the church only makes progress when men help each other, and when one honestly approves what another has begun.²⁰ Cooperation between the builders are therefore of great importance, something Calvin learnt from firsthand experience in the years preceding the publication of his Acts commentary. Since his return to Geneva in 1541 he struggled with the composition of the Company of Pastors. In a letter, dated March 14, 1542, he writes the following to Myconius:

Our colleagues are rather a hindrance than a help to us: they are rude and self-conceited, have no zeal, and less learning. But what is worst of all, I cannot trust them, even although I very much wish that I could: for by many evidences they shew they are estranged from us, and give scarcely any indication of a sincere and trustworthy disposition.²¹

In the following years Calvin would work to create a qualified and unified Company of Pastors. Initially, after Calvin's return, men of lesser ability were hired, but they were gradually replaced as better men became available. Finally, by 1546, Calvin succeeded in creating a group of pastors that formed a team of colleagues that could really help one another in building the church in Geneva. The same applies to the Consistory.²²

A final intriguing question, or rather a cluster of questions, will conclude this topic. Is it possible that Calvin, at this early stage of the existence of the church as reflected in Acts, extends the metaphor of the building to also include the household (*domus, domesticus*)? After all, he calls on every one of the faithful to organize his home in such a way that it is an image of the church (*ut sit Ecclesiae imago*).²³ Are godly households, therefore, building blocks of the edifice of the church? Or even more interesting, is it possible that, in this early stage, Calvin

¹⁸ Comm. on Acts 20:16, COR XII/2,177,3-5.

¹⁹ Comm. on Acts 21:19, COR XII/2,204,1-2.

²⁰ Comm. on Acts 11:24, COR XII/1,342,17-19.

²¹ CO 11,378-379, J. Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, vol. 1, transl. J. Bonnet and D. Constable (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable & Co., 1855), 290-292.

²² G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 53-83.

²³ Comm. on Acts 16:15, COR XII/2,78,6-7.

locates the church *in* the household? This is what Calvin says of the house of Cornelius (*quod domesticam habuerit ecclesiam Cornelius*), commending him – and every other true worshipper – for not allowing God to be banished from his house.²⁴ And is the reason for Calvin’s use of expressions like “the household of faith”²⁵ or “the spiritual household”²⁶ maybe because at that stage the church existed mainly within the houses of the believers? This might well be the case. And maybe Calvin even saw in this a pattern to be emulated in the church of his own day. It is very possible that for this idea Calvin went back to the homilies of Chrysostom who wanted every individual household to become a church. Seeing the women, children and maidservants singing hymns and praying to God for Peter’s release, Chrysostom calls upon his readers to shape their houses in the same way, even at night.²⁷

13.1.2. Head and body

Calvin’s ecclesiological battle with the Papists revolves primarily around the image of the body with its Head.²⁸ Very often he investigates and refutes the Papists’ boastful claim of having the church (*se Ecclesiam habere*), almost to the point of being sick of it.²⁹ And every time the conclusion sounds similar to the one in the dedicatory letter, although in different words and with the use of different images: it is ridiculous to produce a body (the church) without a Head, and thus a cadaver.³⁰ Calvin’s controversy with the Papists about the church is, therefore, not in the first place about the body but about the Head. The Papists have cut off the Head, the Son of God, who is the fountain of eternal life and always gives life through his Spirit. They have deprived Christ of his power, dispossessed him of his sovereignty and stripped him of his authority.³¹ The Papists have compromised the position of the only Head of the church, Jesus Christ. From the silly (*ineptus*) exegesis of Acts 1:13 where the primacy of Peter is deduced from the fact that his name is listed first, Calvin draws the conclusion that the Papists are trying to prove from Scripture that there is another head of the church second

²⁴ Comm. on Acts 10:2, COR XII/1,294,7-8.

²⁵ See e.g. comm. on Acts 8:21, COR XII/1,247,7; comm. on Acts 11:29, COR XII/1,346,5-6.

²⁶ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,10,12.

²⁷ *Hom.* 26, PG 60,203.

²⁸ For more on this image, see B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 179-188; W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1956), 187-188; W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1957), 316-329; H.J. Selderhuis, ‘Church on Stage’, 55.

²⁹ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,8,19-20; for other places where Calvin refers to this boasting of the Papists, see Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,8,11-12; comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,3-5 (see also comm. on Acts 2:40 where Calvin ascribes the same kind of boasting to the Jewish leaders); comm. on Acts 4:11, COR XII/1,121,25-27.

³⁰ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,8,22-23.

³¹ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,8,20-21 & 27-28; see also Ch. Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 262ff.

to Christ.³² Who this other head is, apparently needs no explication. In his commentary on Acts 15:13 Calvin is more specific – there he makes a mockery of the pope’s claim to be the head of the universal church as successor of Peter. After all, in this passage the authority of James rather than that of Peter determines the decree of the council in Jerusalem. Peter allowed another to be over him, something the primacy of the pope would never tolerate.³³ In Chrysostom, Erasmus and Cajetan the development of this doctrine from the early church to the time of the Reformation can be clearly detected. Chrysostom, although highlighting the role of Peter within the college of apostles, still adds that Peter does everything with common consent, nothing imperiously.³⁴ When a replacement of Judas has to be chosen, Peter defers the decision to the whole body.³⁵ Erasmus, while avoiding the impression of tyranny and the usurpation of absolute power, nonetheless maintains the primacy of Peter and the apostolic succession. When Peter takes the word on the day of Pentecost, Erasmus wants his readers to recognize Peter’s rank and authority. He, as the chief bishop, unsheathed the sword of the Spirit. Erasmus adds that the eleven apostles were with him in order to avoid the impression that Peter usurped absolute power.³⁶ But for Erasmus Peter remains the prince of the apostles (*Apostolorum princeps*)³⁷ and the chief shepherd of the church (*summus Ecclesiae Pastor*).³⁸ In Cajetan Peter is clearly the first. When Peter stands up to preach on the day of Pentecost, Cajetan’s short comment speaks volumes: “Peter is always found to be the first (*semper Petrus invenitur primus*).”³⁹ And a most striking comment is found in Cajetan’s commentary on Acts 12:5. The church’s prayer for the imprisoned Peter leads Cajetan to comment: “Hence it clearly is evident to what extent the prayers of the church are able to benefit an imprisoned pontiff.”⁴⁰ Apparently no further explanation is needed – the prayer for the imprisoned Peter is on the same level as prayer for an imprisoned pope. And what was true of the primacy of the pope, also applied to Rome in general: the Church of Rome was considered to be the mother and head of all the churches.⁴¹ Of course Calvin knew about the difference in stature between churches. He knew of the difference between principal

³² Comm. on Acts 1:13, COR XII/1,34,2-5.

³³ Comm. on Acts 15:13, COR XII/2,48,11-16; see also *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,522ff. For more on Calvin’s view on collegiality, see A. Ganoczy, *Calvin und Vaticanum II* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1965), 3-24.

³⁴ *Hom.* 3, PG 60,34.

³⁵ *Hom.* 3, PG 60,36.

³⁶ LB VII, 669B.

³⁷ LB VII, 707A.

³⁸ LB VII, 707F.

³⁹ Acts 2:14, TdVC, 436.

⁴⁰ Acts 12:5, TdVC, 455.

⁴¹ Comm. on Acts 11:26, COR XII/1,343,14-15; see also *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,524.

churches (*primariae ecclesiae*) and other, lesser ones (*ad alias minores*), and that tumult in the former had much more effect than tumult in the latter. That is why Calvin deemed Paul's prolonged stay in Antioch in Acts 15 so prudent; before he left, the apostle wanted to be sure that there was unity in that important church, and exactly in this way he showed his concern for all the other churches.⁴² Calvin also has no problem calling the church in Jerusalem the first church.⁴³ In fact, Jerusalem was with good reason held in the highest esteem among all the churches, cherished and revered as their mother (the very title that was claimed for the Church of Rome). But the reason for Jerusalem's position, Calvin says, was that it was the fountain from which the Gospel had been channeled.⁴⁴ The Gospel – the very soul of the church, which the Papists had abolished⁴⁵ – had given Jerusalem its name. Furthermore, the honor, which the church in Antioch received for being the place where believers were first called Christians, did not give them greater authority. To the contrary, the church in Antioch was honoring Christ as Head of all by financially helping the church in Jerusalem, from whom they had received the Gospel.⁴⁶ Christ, through the Gospel, had given Antioch its preeminence. So, although there is difference in stature between churches – and pastors, for that matter – this never robs Christ of the position that only belongs to him.

For Calvin Christ is the only anointed Head of the body of the church, the Governor of the church and the Giver of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ And it is this Head that determines the body; the direction is from the Head to the body and not vice versa:

... whenever Calvin thinks of the stability, unity and continuity of the body of Christ, he customarily directs our attention to the Head, for it is the Head, Christ, who determines the character of the body. It is from the identity of Christ, first of all, that Calvin derives the persistent identity of the body.⁴⁸

⁴² Comm. on Acts 15:36, COR XII/2,63,16-24.

⁴³ Comm. on Acts 15:2, COR XII/2,28,17.

⁴⁴ Comm. on Acts 15:1, COR XII/2,26,24-26; see also his comm. on Acts 11:26, COR XII/1,343,5-6, where Calvin says that Jerusalem was the fountain from which Christianity first flowed, as well as his comm. on Acts 13:27, COR XII/1,382,12-13, where he calls Jerusalem God's sanctuary, the royal seat, the fountain of truth, the light of the whole world. For more on this, see W. de Greef, *Van Één Stam. Calvijn over Joden en Christenen in de Context van de Late Middeleeuwen* (Delft: Uitgeverij Eburon, 2012), 93.

⁴⁵ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,9,13-15.

⁴⁶ Comm. on Acts 11:26-27, COR XII/1,343,9-10 & 20-21 & 33-36.

⁴⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:36, COR XII/1,78,12 & 21-22; see also comm. on Acts 2:25, COR XII/1,68,17-18.

⁴⁸ B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 181.

For example, the teaching of Christ's resurrection, Calvin says, must be transferred to the whole body of the church, because all the godly must be raised up by the hand of God.⁴⁹ And again with regards to the resurrection, the reformer states that just as the truth of the prophecy of his resurrection appears in Christ as Head, so it takes place in the individual members of his body.⁵⁰ And once more showing the determinative direction of movement from the Head to the body, but now from a negative perspective, Calvin is very clear: the person, who does not want to subject himself to the Head, also severs himself from the body.⁵¹

It is, therefore, the Head that determines the unity of the body.⁵² The unity of the seed of Abraham, of which Peter speaks in Acts 3, is only to be found in Christ the Head, Calvin says.⁵³ No trouble or dislike, therefore, ought to be so great that we do not cherish, as much as we can, unity with the whole body.⁵⁴ Even when, in Acts 8, the body of believers was broken into pieces by persecution and flight, it did not break up the unity of the church. Instead, more churches sprang up from the mutilated and scattered members, and the body of Christ was spread far and wide.⁵⁵ The reason being that the body's unity is not determined by the individual members, but by the Head. On the other hand, whereas the mutilation and scattering of members as a result of persecution does not break up the unity of the body, setting aside the Word of God does. Once the truth of God is departed from, men are drawn in different directions like lacerated limbs.⁵⁶ See how creatively Calvin can play with the image of the Head, the body and the members / limbs to suit his needs in different contexts.

A final comment on Calvin's use of the image of the Head and the body will be in order. The body of Christ consists of the sons of God.⁵⁷ Those who have been eternally adopted by God are engrafted into the body of Christ.⁵⁸ These are two stray remarks that show the church as

⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 8:33, COR XII/1,257,12-14.

⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 13:36, COR XII/1,391,28-30; see also Calvin's explanation of Peter's use of the Psalms in Acts 1:20, where he says that these were fulfilled in Christ, the Head, but also in David as a member of the body of Christ, COR XII/1,40,10-15.

⁵¹ Comm. on Acts 3:23, COR XII/1,110,17-18.

⁵² The theme of the unity of the church will be discussed in more detail later on, but at this point it is only briefly mentioned in relation to Calvin's use of the image of the Head and the body. See also B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 181.

⁵³ Comm. on Acts 3:25, COR XII/1,112,19.

⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 6:1, COR XII/1,163,33-36.

⁵⁵ Comm. on Acts 8:1, COR XII/1,231,8-11; see the same in his comm. on Acts 11:19, COR XII/1,338,8-9 & 19-20, where Calvin says that the Lord caused more bodies to be born out of some of the mangled members.

⁵⁶ Comm. on Acts 23:6 COR XII/2,235,19-21.

⁵⁷ Comm. on Acts 17:28, COR XII/2,126,12-14.

⁵⁸ Comm. on Acts 18:10, COR XII/2,141,21-22; see also B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 179-180: "Participation in the body of Christ then cannot be equated with external membership in the church; on the contrary, the nature of faith suggests that this is something which happens again and again. At the same time, it

God's elect – a central aspect of Calvin's thought on the church that, it must be noted, does not feature prominently in his commentary on Acts.⁵⁹ This might be due to the dominant place of the visibility of the early church in this commentary. In the only place where Calvin approaches some form of definition of the church, he says that by the word 'church' Luke means the people themselves and the whole body. In this context it refers to the concrete church in Jerusalem.⁶⁰ And in several other places he also refers to the body of the church as a localized, demonstrable reality. Regarding the church in Philippi Calvin says that a considerable body of the church was gathered together.⁶¹ And in Berea we see that noblemen and common men, men distinguished by a position of honor and those who are despised, are growing together into the one body of the church (*in unum Ecclesiae corpus coalescere*).⁶² And in his commentary on Acts 28:12 the reformer says that there was some body of the church at Puteoli (*quando et Puteolis aliquod erat Ecclesiae corpus*).⁶³ In the book of Acts the spreading of the Gospel from Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, results in visible and geographically located bodies of the church. And Calvin, who wants to expound the clear and obvious meaning of the author, does not deviate from this obvious meaning when commenting on the text.

13.1.3. The King and his kingdom

The third central motive in Calvin's view on the church in the book of Acts is the motive of the kingdom. It should be said from the outset that, for Calvin, there is no significant difference between the 'kingdom of God' and the 'kingdom of Christ'.⁶⁴ It is true, the coming of Christ does mean the renewal (*instauratio*) of the kingdom⁶⁵, and whenever Calvin speaks about the

is obviously the church which is thought of as the body of Christ: manifestly, we are once again in the presence of a metaphor which embraces Calvin's dialectical understanding of the church."

⁵⁹ See e.g. G. Plasger, 'Ecclesiology', in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 323-325; B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church*, 52-56; F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 67-87; E.-M. Faber, 'Mutual Connectedness as a Gift and a Task: On John Calvin's Understanding of the Church', 126-128.

⁶⁰ Comm. on Acts 15:4, COR XII/2,32,24-25.

⁶¹ Comm. on Acts 16:16, COR XII/2,79,19-20.

⁶² Comm. on Acts 17:11, COR XII/2,104,14-16.

⁶³ Comm. on Acts 28:12, COR XII/2,307,10-11.

⁶⁴ W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 333-336; M.A. van den Berg, *Het Rijk van Christus als Historische Realiteit. Calvijns Anti-apocalyptische Uitleg van het Boek Daniël* (Apeldoorn: Uitgeverij De Banier, 2008), 188; F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 112. The same applies to the concepts 'kingdom of his Son' (Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,6,23; comm. on Acts 4:25, COR XII/1,130,24) and 'kingdom of heaven' (e.g. in comm. on Acts 10:24, COR XII/1,309,20; comm. on Acts 26:7, COR XII/2,274,33) – these refer to the same reality, and Calvin uses them interchangeably.

⁶⁵ Comm. on Acts 19:8, COR XII/2,157,24 & 27-28.

‘beginning’ (*ab initio* or *exordium*) of the kingdom, he always uses the possessive ‘of Christ’ to qualify ‘kingdom’.⁶⁶ And Philip is indeed said to unite the kingdom of God with the name of Christ, because it is through Christ that we obtain the blessing that God reigns in us.⁶⁷ But despite these qualifications, Calvin still alternates between ‘kingdom of God’ and ‘kingdom of Christ’ to refer to the same reality, often without any clear rationale for his choice in a particular context.⁶⁸

In one instance he can mention the teaching of the Gospel as one of the particulars of the kingdom of Christ (*quum de Christi regno sermo habetur*)⁶⁹, while in another instance saying that the teaching of the Gospel is called the kingdom of God (*regnum Dei iterum vocatur Euangelii doctrina*).⁷⁰ He can also say that, whatever the apostles spoke or wrote about the kingdom of God, was given them by Christ, thereby implying that Christ himself considers his kingdom to be the same as the kingdom of God.⁷¹ It is not true that, for Calvin, there is a contrast between the kingdom before and after Christ’s first coming; it is also not true that the kingdom of God is a material kingdom, limited to the Old Testament, while the spiritual kingdom of Christ is something of the New Testament. In fact, Calvin speaks about the kingdom in much the same way as he does about the church – just as the church has been present from the very beginning, although decisively restored with the coming of Christ (see the discussion in paragraph 3.2), so the kingdom, having existed from the beginning, receives its decisive form in the coming and work of Christ.⁷²

This similarity in Calvin’s dealing with both the church and the kingdom should not be surprising, seeing that “Calvin does not significantly distinguish between church and kingdom”⁷³, and often he even seems to identify them: “repeatedly and without qualification,

⁶⁶ See e.g. Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,5,1-2; comm. on Acts 3:21, COR XII/1,106,26-27; comm. on Acts 16:11, COR XII/2,75,1-2.

⁶⁷ Comm. on Acts 8:5, COR XII/1,235,27-29.

⁶⁸ Therefore Milner’s assertion that, after Christ’s ascension to heaven and his consequent reign over the church in the place of the Father, Calvin henceforth characteristically refers to the kingdom of Christ, does not seem to be completely true, at least not for the commentary on Acts; B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 169.

⁶⁹ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,5,3-5.

⁷⁰ Comm. on Acts 20:25, COR XII/2,185,10-11.

⁷¹ Comm. on Acts 1:3, COR XII/1,19,23-24.

⁷² Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,5,9-12: “For although the Son of God has always reigned from the very beginning of the world, yet it was after his revelation in the flesh, and the publication of his Gospel, that he began to set up a judgment-seat plainer to see than ever before.”

⁷³ F.A.V. Harms, *In God’s Custody*, 109. See also M.A. van den Berg, *Het Rijk van Christus als Historische Realiteit*, 187-189; W. van’t Spijker, ‘Koninkrijk van Christus bij Bucer en bij Calvijn’, *Theologia Reformata* 34:3 (1991): 222. Although B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 169-170, agrees with this, he nuances it somewhat when he points to Christ’s sovereignty of the whole world. The kingdom of Christ must, therefore, be thought of as pertaining to all men, as well as to the church.

he asserts that the church is Christ's kingdom."⁷⁴ His commentary on Acts confirms this view. There are several instances in his commentary where church and kingdom seem to refer to the same reality, or at least overlap to a considerably degree. "When we talk about the kingdom of Christ, we must take note of two things in particular", Calvin says in his dedicatory letter. He then goes on to mention things, which are typically descriptive of the church. Firstly, he says, we should take note of the preaching of the Gospel by which Christ gathers his church and governs it once it has been gathered. And secondly, we should take note of the fellowship of the believers who are truly regarded as the people of Christ.⁷⁵ In dealing with Peter's use of a Psalm in Acts 1:20, Calvin says that David, in this Psalm, is describing the condition of Christ's kingdom. He immediately adds, then, that this Psalm contains the general image of the whole church.⁷⁶

The close connection between church and kingdom, which others have identified in other parts of Calvin's work, also rings true for his commentary on Acts. Christ's reign finds its particular presence and visibility in the church. This does not mean that there is no differentiation. Sometimes Calvin uses 'kingdom' to refer to the church in a very particular and concrete way, for example when he says that Paul tried for three months to set up the kingdom of God among the Ephesians⁷⁷, clearly referring to Paul's preaching in the synagogue in Ephesus in order to plant the church there. In other instances he uses 'kingdom' to refer to the church in a broader and more general way, as in Acts 14:27, where Calvin asserts that those who were alienated from the kingdom of God should be united with the seed of Abraham in order to constitute the one church of God.⁷⁸

Having dealt with Calvin's use of words and concepts, it is time to turn to the content of his use of the motive of the kingdom. Several aspects impose themselves on the attentive reader. The most appropriate aspect with which to start is the King of this kingdom. After all, Calvin considers the book of Acts to be a picture of the beginning of the reign of Christ. This book

⁷⁴ P.J. Wilcox, *Restoration, Reformation and the Progress of the Kingdom of Christ: Evangelisation in the Thought and Practice of John Calvin, 1555-1564* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1993), 126 (see also footnote).

⁷⁵ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,5,3-7; for more on this particular sentence, see P.J. Wilcox, *Restoration, Reformation and the Progress of the Kingdom of Christ*, 124.

⁷⁶ Comm. on Acts 1:20, COR XII/1,40,4-6; for more places where Calvin associates church and kingdom, see also his comm. on Acts 4:11, COR XII/1,121,9-10; comm. on Acts 11:2, COR XII/1,333,3-5; comm. on Acts 14:27, COR XII/2,24,26-28; comm. on Acts 20:16, COR XII/2,177,3-5.

⁷⁷ Comm. on Acts 19:9, COR XII/2,158,10-11.

⁷⁸ Comm. on Acts 14:27, COR XII/2,24,26-28; see also comm. on Acts 20:1, COR XII/2,172,5-9; comm. on Acts 20:16, COR XII/2,177,3-5.

starts with the ascension of Christ, by which he was declared to be the supreme King of heaven and earth (*summus Rex caeli et terrae*).⁷⁹ As was said earlier, this kingship finds its most visible application in the church. In commenting on James' reference to the words of the prophets in Acts 15:16, the reformer says that the church reaches its true and proper constitution (*vera sit et proba Ecclesiae constitutio*) when the throne of David is raised up on high, and Christ alone is prominent; the church is in a proper state only when all are subject to him, the supreme King.

At this point in his commentary on Acts 15:16, as in many other places, Calvin highlights the way in which Christ reigns: the teaching of the Gospel.⁸⁰ The kingdom of God rests upon the teaching of the Gospel⁸¹, and the church is gathered (*colligit*) and governed (*gubernat*) by it.⁸² The kingdom is opened to us by the external preaching of the Gospel (*externa Euangelii praedicatio*), although Calvin is quick to add that no one enters unless the Spirit also draws him inwardly.⁸³ The external call of the preaching and the internal draw of the Spirit are two sides of the same coin; through them people are brought into submission to Christ.⁸⁴ Calvin gives a picturesque description of this powerful combination of preaching and Spirit in his dedicatory letter to Radziwil:

... if, when the heat of battle was at its greatest and fiercest, the harmonious music of pipes had so much influence on the Spartans, that it calmed the ferocity innate in that warlike people, and tempered the violence which, on that occasion, runs riot and gets out of hand, even in people who are otherwise gentle of nature, *how much better and more effectively will the kingdom of Christ bring this about by the heavenly music of the Holy Spirit?* (Italics added, with 'heavenly music' referring to the preaching of the Gospel – HHvA). And I say this because it not only tames savage beasts, but makes lambs out of wolves, lions and bears, because it turns spears into pruning hooks and makes swords into ploughshares.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,26-27 & 12,1-2; comm. on Acts 19:4, COR XII/2,154,25-26. See also comm. on Acts 4:27, COR XII/1,132,7-8, as well as comm. on Acts 10:38, COR XII/1,321,19-21, where Calvin suggests that Christ was anointed as King (and Priest) even before his ascension.

⁸⁰ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,51,24-36; for Christ's reign through the preaching of the Gospel, see also comm. on Acts 1:8, COR XII/1,27,22-23; comm. on Acts 8:5, COR XII/1,235,25-28

⁸¹ Comm. on Acts 16:5, COR XII/2,71,2-3; in his comm. on Acts 20:25, COR XII/2,185,10-11, Calvin says that the preaching of the Gospel lays the foundation of the kingdom of God; see also comm. on Acts 18:24, COR XII/2,148,12-14.

⁸² Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,5,3-5.

⁸³ Comm. on Acts 14:27, COR XII/2,24,32-34.

⁸⁴ See W. van't Spijker, 'Koninkrijk van Christus bij Bucer en bij Calvin', 221.

⁸⁵ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,5,21-24 & 6,1-4.

The combination of Word and Spirit, as the means by which Christ reigns as supreme King, makes clear that the kingdom has a profoundly spiritual and personal character. For Calvin the kingdom of Christ does not primarily need an earthly and outward appearance as in the papal kingdom.⁸⁶ He also rejects the Chiliasts, and their exposition of Scripture, who fell in the error of taking all the prophecies, which describe the kingdom of Christ figuratively on the pattern of earthly kingdoms, and applying them in a manner that would profit the flesh.⁸⁷

Calvin does not fail to point out the spiritual nature of the kingdom.⁸⁸ Right at the end of his commentary, Acts 28:23, Calvin says that Paul taught his Jewish listeners the nature of the kingdom of God among them. Because of their wrong understanding of the kingdom (making it consist of ease, pleasure and an abundance of present goods, just as the disciples did according to Calvin in his commentary on Acts 1:8), the right definition needed to be established, “so that they might know that the kingdom of God is spiritual (*spirituale esse regnum Dei*), and that the beginning of it was newness of life, and the end, blessed immortality and the glory of heaven.”⁸⁹ In his commentary on Acts 17:18 Calvin describes the beginning of the kingdom as salvation from Christ alone, forgiveness and reconciliation with God, and renewal by the Spirit, while the end is described as the hope of the future resurrection. All of this, Calvin says, makes clear that the kingdom of God is spiritual.⁹⁰ And when Christ is said to have spoken about the things concerning the kingdom of God, Calvin understands it to be God’s reign in us (*in nobis*), of which the beginning is regeneration and of which the perfection is participation in the glory of God.⁹¹ It can, therefore, rightly be said that the kingdom of God is in us.⁹² Through the preaching of the Gospel a place is prepared in our hearts for the kingdom of Christ; the kingdom of God is set up in us (*in nobis*).⁹³

Therefore, when Calvin speaks about the renewal which had been promised to the fathers at the coming of the Messiah, this is first and foremost a spiritual and personal renewal: “... because this kingdom brings us back from rebellion to be under obedience to God, and makes

⁸⁶ See A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987), 216; B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 172; W. van’t Spijker, ‘Koninkrijk van Christus bij Bucer en bij Calvijn’, 220-221.

⁸⁷ Comm. on Acts 1:8, COR XII/1,27,30-33; see also Inst. 2.15.3-5.

⁸⁸ See e.g. comm. on Acts 1:8, COR XII/1,27,23-24; comm. on Acts 17:7, COR XII/2,101,29-30; comm. on Acts 17:18, COR XII/2,112,24; comm. on Acts 28:20, COR XII/2,310,10-11.

⁸⁹ Comm. on Acts 28:23, COR XII/2,311,10-15.

⁹⁰ Comm. on Acts 17:18, COR XII/2,112,20-25; for another example where Calvin describes both the beginning and the end of the kingdom of God, see comm. on Acts 28:31, COR XII/2,316,31-34.

⁹¹ Comm. on Acts 1:3, COR XII/1,19,25-27 & 20,8-9.

⁹² W. van’t Spijker, ‘Koninkrijk van Christus bij Bucer en bij Calvijn’, 221.

⁹³ Comm. on Acts 1:8, COR XII/1,28,1-3; see also comm. on Acts 8:5, COR XII/1,235,28-34.

sons out of enemies, it consists, first of all, of the free forgiveness of sins, by which God reconciles us to himself, and brings us into his people by adoption, and secondly, of the renewal of life, by which he fashions us according to his own image.”⁹⁴ Christ reigns through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, which in turns sets up the kingdom in the hearts of the believers, and they are then brought together into the people of God, the church. Constitutive of this ingathering of people into the church since the coming of Christ, is the inclusion of the Gentiles. Calvin is convinced that the kingdom of Christ can only be established if God is invoked everywhere throughout the whole world and the Gentiles are united into his holy people.⁹⁵ The Jews were still considered the firstborn in the family of God, but nevertheless the door of the kingdom of heaven was opened to the Gentiles.⁹⁶ This was not only because the Gospel was preached to them by the outward voice, but also because they were effectually called to faith by the illumination of the Spirit⁹⁷ – exactly the means (preaching and Spirit) by which Christ governs his kingdom.

Christ’s kingdom, however, has a very real and ever-present antithesis, for which Calvin warns his readers from the start. The moment when he asserts the kingship of Christ through the preaching of the Gospel in his *Argumentum*, he is forced to add: “the Holy Spirit warns us that the kingdom of Christ never raises itself without Satan furiously setting himself against it.”⁹⁸ It is therefore nothing new or unusual for the church to lie under tyranny or be trampled under the feet of the ungodly.⁹⁹ Calvin even calls the believers fuel for the flames of persecution (*quid enim aliud sumus quam flammæ pabulum?*).¹⁰⁰ In the book of Acts this translates itself in many infamous attempts by the ungodly to impede the course of the Gospel.¹⁰¹ In his commentary on Acts 4 Calvin uses the reference to Psalm 2 in the prayer of the believers in Jerusalem to expand on this issue. He is clear that the kingdom of Christ will never have peace in this world, and we should not be dismayed when we are required to fight. However, we go to war under the banner of Christ, and God will forever maintain the kingdom of his Son, of which he himself is the Author.¹⁰² From the scattering of believers after the death of

⁹⁴ Comm. on Acts 19:8, COR XII/2,157,24-30 & 158,1; see also comm. on Acts 13:38, COR XII/1,394,13-15; comm. on Acts 20:25, COR XII/2,185,10-12.

⁹⁵ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,50,34-36.

⁹⁶ Comm. on Acts 13:26, COR XII/1,381,23-25.

⁹⁷ Comm. on Acts 14:27, COR XII/2,24,29-31.

⁹⁸ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,15-17; see the same in comm. on Acts 17:5, COR XII/2,100,9-11.

⁹⁹ Comm. on Acts 7:6, COR XII/1,182,9-11.

¹⁰⁰ Comm. on Acts 7:30, COR XII/1,197,7.

¹⁰¹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,12,22-24.

¹⁰² Comm. on Acts 4:25, COR XII/1,130,16-18 & 24-25 & 131,1-2.

Stephen, Calvin comes to a similar conclusion and applies it to his own day: the Lord today (*hodie*) will achieve triumphs out of the cross and persecution, so that the church may grow out of its dispersion.¹⁰³

Satan has multiple strategies to attack the church; he sets fire to our bodies as well as to our souls.¹⁰⁴ One strategy is the spreading of rumors among the believers, which makes them suspicious of one another. Satan knows that these disagreements and jealousies are one the best ways of overthrowing the kingdom of Christ.¹⁰⁵ The most dangerous strategy of Satan, however, is the corruption of doctrine. He can either do this by overthrowing the Word of God with false doctrines and gross superstitions, or when he pretends to be a friend of the Word. In the latter case Satan transforms himself into an angel of light.¹⁰⁶ This is something Calvin sees most clearly among the Papists of his days.¹⁰⁷ The Papacy has overthrown the worship of God, suppressed the doctrine of salvation and has driven out the kingdom Christ.¹⁰⁸

13.1.4. Summary: The Golden Age of the bloody martyrs

Calvin describes the time of the coming of Christ and of the church of the first century as a Golden Age (*praeclara et incomparabilis aurei illius saeculi conditio palam demonstrat*).¹⁰⁹ Stated negatively: whatever excellence flourished and was vigorous in the church began to perish after a hundred years.¹¹⁰ This is exactly the age he is dealing with in his commentary on Acts. In order to describe this age he shows a preference for using images that match his view. Christ is the foundation of the living building of the church, which was built up by master builders through the preaching of the Gospel. Christ is the Head of the body of the church, a body that lives by being connected to him from whom all good things flow. And Christ is the King of the spiritual kingdom that takes its primary form in the lives of the believers. However, it was a Golden Age covered in blood. Satan was constantly and in different ways attacking the kingdom of Christ. The process of constructing the building of the church was hampered by sinfulness from the inside as well as attacks from the outside. And limbs were being torn from the body of the church as physical persecution arose. For Calvin this serves as

¹⁰³ Comm. on Acts 11:19, COR XII/1,338,23-25.

¹⁰⁴ Comm. on Acts 7:30, COR XII/1,197,7-9.

¹⁰⁵ Comm. on Acts 21:17, COR XII/2,203,22-24.

¹⁰⁶ Comm. on Acts 16:16, COR XII/2,80,21-24.

¹⁰⁷ See also F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 119-120.

¹⁰⁸ Comm. on Acts 23:6, COR XII/2,236,3-5.

¹⁰⁹ Comm. on Psalm 87, CO 31,800.

¹¹⁰ Comm. on Acts 15:2, COR XII/2,32,2-3.

an analogy for the situation of his own time. But just as the reign of Christ and the presence of the Spirit exceeded everything else during the Golden Age, so it still did in the sixteenth century. That makes the analogy possible.

13.2. Extra ecclesiam nulla salus

Only once in Calvin's commentary on Acts does this famous dictum from the church father Cyprian find a place.¹¹¹ An important place, it should be added – right at the end of the key chapter 2 of the book of Acts. The Lord daily added those to the church who were to be saved. The words “to the church” do not appear in the text of Acts 2:47, but it is an inference that is completely logical in the mind of the Genevan reformer. Luke teaches us that this is the way of obtaining salvation, that we should be admitted into the church. For outside of it, just like there is no forgiveness of sins, neither is there hope of eternal life.¹¹² “This granted, he went on to prove that the evangelical church was the true church”, says T.H.L. Parker in his biography of Calvin.¹¹³ Parker makes a crucial point. There is no salvation outside of the church, but what church are we talking about?

13.2.1. The true church

In his commentary on Acts Calvin never uses the concept of the ‘true church’ in a purely positive discussion of the church. After all, the church in itself *is* the body of Jesus Christ, of which it does not need to be said that it is true; the Head of the church ensures this quality. The predicate ‘true’ only needs to be added when the church of Christ is put over and against the false church, which for Calvin means the Papists.¹¹⁴ Only when it needs to “be made clear

¹¹¹ For more on Cyprian's use of this expression, see A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 391-392; G.C. Berkouwer, *The Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 140-144. For Calvin's appropriation of this phrase, see D.W. Jowers, ‘In What Sense Does Calvin Affirm ‘Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus’?’, in *John Calvin's Ecclesiology. Ecumenical Perspectives*, ed. G. Mannion and E. van der Borgh (London / New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 50-68. In his sermon on Acts 5:13-16, SC 8,144,34-38 & 145,1-11, Calvin spends some more time on this issue. He says that man's salvation will be found only on Zion and in Jerusalem, explaining that Zion and Jerusalem signify the church. Forgiveness of sins cannot be found without a person being joined to the church. If we want God to be our Savior, we have to be in his church. Everyone who remains apart seems to have consciously deprived himself of the heavenly kingdom and had completely renounced his salvation.

¹¹² Comm. on Acts 2:47, COR XII/1,92,31-34.

¹¹³ T.H.L. Parker, *John Calvin. A Biography* (Louisville / London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 92.

¹¹⁴ W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 192-195, identifies something similar in the setup of the Institutes: “Let us remind ourselves that he [Calvin] has entitled the first decisive chapter of the *Institutes: Of the true church, with which we strive to be at one, since it is the mother of all the pious*. The next chapter, which is intended to support his arguments against the Roman church, bears the heading: *Comparison of the false church with the*

to all what difference there is between the chaste bride of Christ and the disgusting harlot of Belial, between the sanctuary of God and the brothel of Satan, between the spiritual household of the godly and a pig-sty, and, finally, between the true church and the Roman Curia (*quid denique inter veram Ecclesiam et Romanam curiam intersit*)”¹¹⁵, only then does Calvin revert to the use of ‘true’ as a description of the church. He consistently does this when he compares the church, as Luke describes it, with the pope’s synagogue.¹¹⁶ An example of this comparison can be found in his commentary on the programmatic verses in Acts 2:42-46. Here Calvin says that Luke defines four marks (*quatuor notae*) by which the true and genuine appearance of the church (*vera et genuina Ecclesiae facies*) may be distinguished (the marks of the church will be discussed shortly), after which he adds: “Do we seek the true church of Christ (*vera Christi Ecclesia*)? Its picture is vividly portrayed here for us.”¹¹⁷ In comparison the Papists are frivolous when they confidently thunder out the name of the church. Their teaching compares to the apostles’ teaching as darkness to light; in comparison to scriptural worship, theirs is full of superstitious inventions of men; the hope of salvation that is supposed to rest in Christ alone, they have transferred to the merits of men; and they are as far from pure doctrine as heaven is from hell.¹¹⁸ Scriptural doctrine and worship seems to be at the center of the comparison.

Acts 15:16, according to Calvin, teaches us the true and proper constitution of the church (*vera sit et proba Ecclesiae constitutio*), namely that Christ alone is prominent and that all obey him. In comparison the pope, who boasts in the title of the church, has crushed the church with his tyranny. Although the pope calls himself the Vicar of Christ, he has usurped all the power for himself.¹¹⁹ In this case the comparison centers on the highest power in the church. A power that, it must be said, Christ ultimately exercises through the teaching of the Gospel.¹²⁰ And, to add a final example, in his commentary on Acts 26:7 Calvin urges his readers to wisely distinguish the true church (*est vera Ecclesia*), which can only be found in the authority of God in his Word and in the agreement of the church. This is inevitably followed up with a

true.” See also R.C. Zachman, ‘Revising the Reform: what Calvin Learned from Dialogue with the Roman Catholics’, in *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism. Critique and Engagement, Then and Now*, ed. R.C. Zachman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 165-192.

¹¹⁵ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,10,10-13.

¹¹⁶ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,10,15-16.

¹¹⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,24-27.

¹¹⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,4-11 & 15-16; for similar comparisons, see Calvin’s sermon on Acts 5:25-32, SC 8,167,1-2: there is an incomparably greater difference between God’s teaching and the pope’s than between fire and water, night and day.

¹¹⁹ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,51,24-28 & 31-33.

¹²⁰ Comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,51,33-34.

rejection of the Papists who bury the Word of God under the opinions of men. “But in order to show that we are in agreement with the true church, the proper thing is to begin with the prophets and the apostles; then to them there must be added those whose godliness is known and attested.”¹²¹ Again the comparison focuses on authority and Scripture: the authority of God through his Word versus the authority of the pope built on the tradition.

For Calvin the ‘true’ church is always the antithesis of the ‘false’ church.¹²² Although the reformer never explicitly speaks of the ‘false’ church in his commentary on Acts, the reader is not left in any doubt as to whom he deems worthy of this dubious title, namely the Papists.¹²³ They can be clearly recognized by their continual trumpeting¹²⁴, by their thundering with gaping mouths¹²⁵, and by their boasting¹²⁶ in the title of the church. But in their case it is an empty title¹²⁷, worth nothing, just as a body without a head is useless. Calvin does not consider the Papists worthy of the title of church, for the true church is only to be found where Christ is the Head, ruling all men by the teaching of the Gospel.¹²⁸ The question of Christ’s authority through the Word is crucial for the reformer. And it is in the absence of this authority that the predicate ‘false’ does creep into Calvin’s vocabulary. When it is not Christ’s authority through his Word, then it becomes false authority and false doctrine.¹²⁹

13.2.2. Marks of the church

The transition from the last paragraph to the so-called marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*) is a fairly obvious one, for doctrine seems to be the all-pervading mark of the church for the

¹²¹ Comm. on Acts 26:7, COR XII/2,275,2-4 & 12-16.

¹²² See also *Admonitio paterna*, CO 7,249; *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,614; *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,520. In his sermon on Acts 4:16, 18-19, SC 8,92,31-33, Calvin speaks of the true church as the antithesis of the Jewish council. And in his sermon on Acts 4:32-37, SC 8,113,20-37, the true church is put in opposition to the pope’s claim that he is the church. For Calvin it is evident that the church of God does not exist in the Papacy.

¹²³ Although Calvin, in his commentary on Acts, attacks aspects of the teaching of the Anabaptists, e.g. the communion of goods and baptism, he never uses the broader concept of the ‘true church’ when he puts himself in opposition to these Radical Reformers. It is a concept he exclusively keeps for his rejection of the Papists.

¹²⁴ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,8,12.

¹²⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,3-5.

¹²⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:40, COR XII/1,86,9; comm. on Acts 5:21, COR XII/1,150,7-8.

¹²⁷ Comm. on Acts 4:11, COR XII/1,121,26; comm. on Acts 7:52, COR XII/1,220,15-16; comm. on Acts 15:16, COR XII/2,51,27-29; comm. on Acts 26:7, COR XII/2,275,13-14; see also comm. on Acts 11:26, COR XII/1,343,12-15.

¹²⁸ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,8,20-29.

¹²⁹ See e.g. comm. on Acts 7:2, COR XII/1,177,3-5; comm. on Acts 7:31, COR XII/1,197,24-26; comm. on Acts 16:16, COR XII/2,80,15-24.

reformer of Geneva.¹³⁰ It must be said, however, that the concept of the *notae* occurs seldom in his commentary on Acts, but the place where this concept does occur, as well as the way in which it functions, is such that a proper discussion is justified.¹³¹

Calvin generally identifies two marks of the church: “Ordinarily, Calvin speaks of two such *notae*: ‘Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.’”¹³² However, in the only place in his commentary on Acts where Calvin speaks about the *notae* (he does so twice in that particular passage), he says: “Luke is recording those things which constitute the form of the church visible to the public eye. Indeed, he defines four marks (*quatuor notae*) by which the true and genuine appearance of the church may be distinguished.”¹³³ This citation is noticeable for several reasons. Firstly, it is noticeable for the fact that Calvin considers these *notae* as constitutive of the church “visible to the public eye” (*quibus publicus Ecclesiae status continetur*).¹³⁴ Shortly afterwards he will also deal with the other side of the same coin, the manner of life practiced by the faithful.¹³⁵ Based on the text of Acts 2:42-47, Calvin thus seems to make a deliberate distinction between the public state of the church and the private life of the believers. Secondly, this citation is noticeable for the obvious reason that it deviates from the normal number of marks identified by Calvin.¹³⁶ Does

¹³⁰ “... Calvin can speak of the preaching of the Gospel as though it alone sufficed to distinguish the church”, B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 100. For more on Calvin’s view on the marks of the church, see W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 304-307 & 314-316; B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 99-133; G. Plasger, ‘Ecclesiology’, 328-329. See also R.M. Kingdon, ‘Peter Martyr Vermigli and the Marks of the True Church’, in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History. Essays Presented to George Huntston Williams on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. H.A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 198-214.

¹³¹ Calvin also speaks about the marks of the truly faithful in his sermon on Acts 4:32-37, SC 8,113,14. There he draws a connection between the marks of the truly faithful and the true church.

¹³² B.C. Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 100, in which he quotes Inst. 4.1.9 and also refers to Inst. 4.1.10. See also W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 192-195; T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin. An Introduction to His Thought* (London / New York: Continuum, 1995), 131.

¹³³ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,23-25. J. Ralston, ‘Preaching Makes the Church: Recovering a Missing Ecclesial Mark’, in *John Calvin’s Ecclesiology. Ecumenical Perspectives*, ed. G. Mannion and E. van der Borgh (London / New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 125-142, uses the two marks for an ecumenical purpose, “to encourage renewal in preaching and sacramental practice so that visible unity can be achieved.”

¹³⁴ In his comm. on Acts 2:46, COR XII/1,92,5-7, Calvin speaks about “the public state of the church” (*de publico Ecclesiae statu*).

¹³⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:46, COR XII/1,92,5-7.

¹³⁶ This is not the only time that Calvin deviates from his usual two marks of the church. In his sermon on Acts 2:41-42, SC 8,40,14-17 & 41,6-11, Calvin says that we know the marks which constitute God’s church, namely the proclamation of the Word of God, the Lord’s Supper (interestingly, baptism is not mentioned), and our communion together in love. In his *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,610, Calvin agrees with the Papists on the following three marks of the church: pure doctrine, the right use of the sacraments, and the holy unity. In his Reply to Sadoletto, CO 5,394, he says that there are three things on which the safety of the church is founded and supported: doctrine, discipline, and the sacraments; and to these a fourth is added: ceremonies by which to exercise the people in the office of piety. In his commentary on Galatians 1:2, COR II/XVI,14, he says that “so long as they professed Christianity, worshipped one God, observed the sacraments, and enjoyed some kind of Gospel ministry – they retained the external marks of a church.” And finally, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians

this say something about Calvin's theological consistency or, in this case, inconsistency? Or is it a testimony to his faithful adherence to the text of Scripture that he does not enforce his doctrinal positions onto the text? Or is it maybe confirmation of Calvin's dynamic ecclesiology? And thirdly, this citation is noticeable for the fact that it occurs in a very important and programmatic text, the first of Luke's so-called summaries of the life of the church.¹³⁷ In the Reformed exegesis this particular summary has often functioned as a prescriptive definition, functioning within a liturgical context.¹³⁸ All this validates a closer look at Calvin's commentary on these verses.

Based on the text of Acts 2:42 Calvin identifies and discusses four marks: the teaching of the apostles, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. In the history of the exegesis of this text the second and third marks (fellowship and the breaking of bread) have mostly been taken as one. This was due to the fact that the Vulgate only mentions three marks by combining the second and the third: "And they continued steadfastly in the doctrine of the apostles, and in the communication of the breaking of bread (*et communicatione fractionis panis*), and in prayers." This was the text used in the West up until the sixteenth century. Erasmus, however, changed this to four marks in his Greek text.¹³⁹ In his commentary Calvin shows that he is aware of the debate surrounding this verse:

Fellowship and the breaking of bread may be understood in different ways. Some think that breaking of bread means the Lord's Supper, others that it refers to alms, others again that the faithful had their meals together in common. Some think that *koinonia* is the celebration of the Lord's Supper; I hold rather with those who believe that that is meant by the breaking of bread. For *koinonia* without addition is never found in this sense. I therefore refer it to mutual association, alms, and other duties of brotherly fellowship.¹⁴⁰

1:2, CO 49,307, Calvin says: "What ground, then, did Paul have for recognizing a church in Corinth? It was this: that he saw among them the doctrine of the Gospel, baptism, the Lord's Supper – tokens by which a church ought to be judged of." This confirms "Calvin's dynamic ecclesiology" as H.J. Selderhuis calls it, 'Church on Stage', 46-64.

¹³⁷ For more on the summaries (Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-37, 5:12-16), see A. Noordegraaf, *Creatura Verbi. De Groei van de Gemeente volgens de Handelingen der Apostelen* ('s-Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1983), 71-77.

¹³⁸ E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, N° CXCVII] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), 83-85.

¹³⁹ E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 70.

¹⁴⁰ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,15-22.

Calvin clearly follows Erasmus's four-fold reading of Acts 2:42, although the Greek patristic witness to this same reading might also have had an influence on him.¹⁴¹ Whatever the case might have been, Calvin views 'fellowship' and 'the breaking of bread' as two separate elements.¹⁴²

For Calvin, however, the full weight of these four marks lies with the first, the doctrine of the apostles. The other marks follow from doctrine as fruits or effects (*fructus vel effectus*). As Calvin explains, doctrine is the bond of brotherly fellowship (second mark), doctrine opens the door so that we may call on God (prayer, fourth mark), while the Supper is added to the doctrine as a confirmation (third mark).¹⁴³ Doctrine is the soul of the church (*Ecclesiae anima*). Wherever we hear the pure voice of the Gospel, wherever men continue in the profession of it, and wherever they exercise themselves in regularly hearing it and thereby profiting from it, there without a doubt is the church.¹⁴⁴

This is also the sharp edge of Calvin's criticism of the Papists – they boast the name of church, but they have corrupted the entire teaching of the apostles.¹⁴⁵ Christianity is permeated by lies and false doctrine by this idol of Rome.¹⁴⁶ Darkness and light, hell and heaven – these are the contrasting pairs that Calvin uses to distinguish the doctrine of Rome from the doctrine of the apostles.¹⁴⁷ The Holy Spirit, however, makes known that the church is principally known by this mark (*nota*): whether the simplicity of doctrine, delivered by the apostles, flourishes in it.¹⁴⁸ And this is where Rome falls short in Calvin's estimation: they do not have the Word of God. And therefore, when Rome reproaches us for being separated from the church, it is a great consolation for us that we know otherwise. Who is our witness? The Holy Spirit!¹⁴⁹ In

¹⁴¹ E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 76.

¹⁴² Although viewing them as separate elements, Calvin connects them closely in his sermon on Acts 2:43-45, SC 8,48,32-49,7. In fact, he says that Luke himself brings the Supper and communion together, in order to show that there should always be true union in the church based on brotherly love.

¹⁴³ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,22-25.

¹⁴⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,1-3; the image of doctrine as the soul of the church is also used in serm. on Acts 2:41-42, SC 8,43,8-10: "just as a body without a soul is merely a rotting carcass, so the church without the Word of God is but a chaos." See also *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,520, where Calvin says of the Word of God: "This mark (*nota*) is in no degree doubtful, in no degree fallacious, and it is the mark which God himself impressed upon his church, that she might be discerned thereby. Do we seem unjust in demanding to see this mark? Wherever it does not exist, there no face of a church is seen."

¹⁴⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,3-6; see also the same accusation in comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,15-16; comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,81,36-82,1; serm. on Acts 2:41-42, SC 8,41,12-24 & 42,23-25. For more on the Papists as church, see W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 308-311.

¹⁴⁶ Serm. on Acts 2:18-21, COR V, VIII,287,77-78.

¹⁴⁷ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,7-8 & 15-16; see also the sermon on Acts 2:39-40, SC 8,33,20-21.

¹⁴⁸ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,19-21.

¹⁴⁹ Serm. on Acts 2:43-45, SC 8,46,21-24; shortly afterwards (SC 8,47,27-29) Calvin again calls on the witness of the Holy Spirit: "If the Papists reproach us for not serving God, we know very well that the opposite is true, for we have the witness of the Holy Spirit."

closing his tract on the necessity of reforming the church, Calvin says that the Holy Spirit is a faithful and unerring witness to our doctrine.¹⁵⁰

From doctrine, being the first mark, flow also fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. On these three Calvin is rather brief. He describes fellowship as mutual association, alms and other duties of brotherly fellowship.¹⁵¹ Other than identifying the breaking of bread with the Lord's Supper, Calvin says nothing about this mark.¹⁵² And finally, prayer is specified as public prayer (*de publicis precibus*), which leads Calvin to deny the sufficiency of private prayer without corporate prayer. Public prayer also contains an element of profession of faith.¹⁵³

Almost at the end of this section on the public state of the church Calvin concludes that Luke is clearly right in reciting these four points to describe to us the well-ordered state of the church. In order for the church of his time not to stand in the same line as the Jewish leaders or the Papists, i.e. to boast in the empty name of the church, Calvin calls on his readers to carefully observe this order.¹⁵⁴ This well-ordered state of the church (*rite constitutum Ecclesiae statum*) is reminiscent of a similar description in his earlier commentary on Acts 2:17, where Calvin also speaks of the blessed and well-ordered state of the church (*de beato et bene composito Ecclesiae statu*). In the latter case the words are used in the context of the promises of restoration, which could only be fulfilled by the coming of Christ and the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. What was anticipated by Calvin in Acts 2:17, has seemingly been achieved shortly afterwards, for the well-ordered state of the church is described by him in Acts 2:42 as a reality. In his sermon on the same passage, Acts 2:41-42, Calvin says that, when we see that God's Word is proclaimed appropriately, that the sacraments are administered according to their proper use, and that everyone calls on God with one heart and mind, then we will be able to say that the church has been restored (*restaurée*) in accordance with God's intention.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,534.

¹⁵¹ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,20-22; see for more on this aspect E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 78-79.

¹⁵² E.A. McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving*, 79-83; in his sermon on Acts 2:43-45, SC 8,47,30-31, Calvin accuses himself and the congregation that it is one of their greatest faults that they do not celebrate the Lord's Supper with the zeal of the primitive church (*primitive Eglise*).

¹⁵³ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,29-32; Calvin discusses the advantages of both public and private prayers, as well as the importance of public prayer for our profession of faith in his sermon on Acts 2:41-42, SC 8,44,29-33.

¹⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,26-29.

¹⁵⁵ Sermon on Acts 2:41-42, SC 8,45,9-12.

Following the text of Scripture Calvin enumerates four marks of the church. Milner rightly comments that this does “not throw into question the clear and fixed position taken up by Calvin in the *Institutes*, but [it does] suggest that he is more concerned with the marks as realities than as abstract criteria.”¹⁵⁶ For Calvin the number of marks is not that important, but rather the living picture of the church painted for us in the book of Acts. A picture that, it needs to be said, is dominated by the ever-present first mark, doctrine. This mark is the source and basis for all other marks.

13.2.3. Sects

In Acts 9:2 Luke relates the history of Paul’s acquiring of letters to bring anyone, who is of the Way, to Jerusalem. Calvin comments that Luke uses the word ‘Way’ (*via*; *hodos* in the Greek text), which, he acknowledges, is a common metaphor in Scripture. But despite this, Calvin chooses to translate it with ‘sect’ (*secta*), without giving any reason for this decision. This single example goes to show that the reformer of Geneva does not use the word ‘sect’ in the way many today would expect him to use it, *viz.* negatively; instead he uses it in a multi-faceted way.

There are instances where Calvin uses this term in a neutral, or even positive, way. He can, for example, call the Pharisees a sect that was held in the highest regard.¹⁵⁷ Later on he will explain that, in that time among both Jews and Gentiles, the name ‘heresy’ (*haeresis*) was not viewed negatively, and this is the reason why the Jews openly boasted of their sects.¹⁵⁸ Thus Calvin is somewhat surprised when Tertullus adds to his list of accusations in Acts 24:5 that Paul is a leader of the sect of the Nazarenes, “because we know that the Jews regarded that as praiseworthy rather than blameworthy.”¹⁵⁹ Of course Calvin has his explanation for this peculiarity – namely that by this name Tertullus is referring to the zealots, a sect hated by the Romans – but this does not negate the point he had made earlier, that ‘sects’ (or *haeresis* as a synonym) were viewed positively during that time.¹⁶⁰

There are even cases where Calvin can positively refer to the church as a sect. This is done, for example, in his commentary on Acts 9:2, already referred to in the beginning of this paragraph. The rationale behind this choice of description, which remained absent in Acts 9,

¹⁵⁶ B.C Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church*, 100.

¹⁵⁷ Comm. on Acts 5:34, COR XII/1,157,19-20; see also comm. on Acts 26:4, COR XII/2,273,27-29.

¹⁵⁸ Comm. on Acts 24:14, COR XII/2,254,14-15, 19-21, 25-26; see Cajetan’s negative use of *haeretici* with reference to the Samaritans, in his comm. on Acts 1:8, TdVC, 432.

¹⁵⁹ Comm. on Acts 24:5, COR XII/2,250,5-6.

¹⁶⁰ See a similar comment by Thomas de Vio Cajetan on Acts 15:5, TdVC, 460.

is given in an important passage in his commentary on Acts 19:23 where Luke again uses the word ‘Way’: “As far as the word ‘Way’ is concerned, readers should be reminded that it is taken here for what Latin philosophers call *secta*, a school or sect, and Greek philosophers *haeresis*, a school of thought.”¹⁶¹ Calvin seems to imply that ‘Way’ (*hodos*), *secta* and *haeresis* can all be used interchangeably in a positive, or at least a neutral, sense. And not only did the Jews do this in the time of Acts, but Calvin himself does this. Another example of this can be found in his commentary on Acts 22. When he summarizes Paul’s speech in this chapter he says, *inter alia*, that Paul did not make a quick and casual move to the new sect (*ad novam sectam*), but it was only when he was subdued and convicted by a heavenly oracle, that he gave his allegiance to Christ.¹⁶² Allegiance to Christ and joining the new sect (the church) are, in this context, essentially the same thing.

From the above it is clear that Calvin introduces a particular first-century understanding of the term ‘sect’ to his readers, one he himself uses several times in his commentary to positively refer to Jewish groups as well as to the church. In this understanding ‘sect’ refers to a school of thought or a movement. However, there are also several negative strands in Calvin’s use of this term. In his commentary on Acts 2:43, thus shortly after Pentecost, Calvin says that fear came upon every soul for the preserving and developing of the church. This was necessary, because when a sect arises everybody vigorously oppose it; and as novelty is hateful, the Jews would not have allowed the church to stand for one moment.¹⁶³ What Calvin does here is to call the church a sect from the perspective of the Jews, seemingly implying that sects are by definition a novelty, and subsequently making clear that both sects and novelty are not well accepted among men.¹⁶⁴

There is another negative strand, however, that ultimately dominates all others. This is Calvin’s understanding of sects as persons or groups who break up the unity of faith as a result of deviation from the Word of God. After explaining that ‘Way’, *secta* and *haeresis* were used interchangeably, and not necessarily negatively, Calvin speculates as to why then Luke specifically chose the word ‘Way’ to describe the church in Acts 19:23. His proposal is that Luke avoided a word like *secta* because in the church of God, where unity of faith ought to prevail, it is detestable for each one to make up his own mind as to what he should follow, and

¹⁶¹ Comm. on Acts 19:23, COR XII/2,165,22-23.

¹⁶² Comm. on Acts 22:1, COR XII/2,214,19-20.

¹⁶³ Comm. on Acts 2:43, COR XII/1,89,4-9.

¹⁶⁴ The Latin word *atque* links ‘sects’ and ‘novelty’.

that this word was therefore rightly held in disrepute among the godly.¹⁶⁵ The church of God differs from all unenlightened sects (*a profanis omnibus sectis differt Ecclesia Dei*) in the fact that it listens only to what God says and is governed by his commands.¹⁶⁶ Nothing is more characteristic of faith than agreement (*consensus*), and nothing is more contrary to it than sects (*sectae*). The only holy bond of unity is the truth of God, and once that is set aside, everyone starts attracting disciples for his own ideas. As soon as people depart from the Word of God, men are drawn in different directions like lacerated limbs.¹⁶⁷ Therefore Calvin, following the apostle Paul, warns against wolves that disperse the flock, draw the church away from the unity of the faith and divide it into sects.¹⁶⁸ In his commentary on Acts Calvin applies this understanding of ‘sects’ to four groups in particular: the Jews, the Gentiles, heretical groups in the history of the church, and to the Papists.

Firstly, Calvin applies this to the Jews. At that time there were many factions among the Jews. Yet we know that just as there is only one God we must have one and the same Master, and just as there is only one truth we have one law to hold us together in unity and in one confession of faith.¹⁶⁹ Calvin says that corruption of the law was the origin of sects among the Jews.¹⁷⁰ The government of the church of that time had completely collapsed, and for that reason religion was exposed to sectarian divisions.¹⁷¹ Calvin identifies three sects among the Jews: the Essenes (which Luke omits), the Pharisees, and the Sadducees.¹⁷² He is especially surprised that the Sadducees, a profane sect who hated the doctrine of the resurrection, could have had so much influence at that time.¹⁷³

Secondly, Calvin applies his primary understanding of sects to the Gentiles. Because a single religion was not flourishing at that time, the nations were divided into various sects. Variety is born of corruption (*varietatem istam ex corruptela natam esse admonet*).¹⁷⁴ In the same

¹⁶⁵ Comm. on Acts 19:23, COR XII/2,165,22-26.

¹⁶⁶ Comm. on Acts 28:21, COR XII/2,311,33-35.

¹⁶⁷ Comm. on Acts 23:6, COR XII/2,235,16-21; see also comm. on Acts 24:14, COR XII/2,254,23-25, where Calvin says that heresies cause destruction and the breaking-up of the church, while the safety of the church consists in the unity of faith (*salus in fidei unitate consistit*).

¹⁶⁸ Comm. on Acts 20:30, COR XII/2,190,18-20.

¹⁶⁹ Serm. on Acts 4:1-4, SC 8,75,10-13.

¹⁷⁰ Comm. on Acts 23:6, COR XII/2,235,21-22.

¹⁷¹ Comm. on Acts 22:3, COR XII/2,215,28-29.

¹⁷² Comm. on Acts 23:6, COR XII/2,236,25-26.

¹⁷³ See e.g. comm. on Acts 4:1, COR XII/1,117,12-13; comm. on Acts 5:17, COR XII/1,147,23. For Calvin calling the Pharisees a sect, see comm. on Acts 15:5, COR XII/2,33,12-16.

¹⁷⁴ Comm. on Acts 17:26, COR XII/2,121,17-19.

chapter Calvin mentions the sects of the Epicureans and the Stoics as examples of this corrupt variety.¹⁷⁵

In the third place Calvin applies this understanding of ‘sects’ to certain groups in the history of the church. In the very beginning of the church in Acts there was a certain Nicolas, one of the seven chosen in Acts 6, whom Calvin calls the founder of a scandalous and shameful sect (*turpis ac flagitiosae sectae author*) who wished women to be prostitutes.¹⁷⁶ He also calls Montanus, Priscillian, the Donatists, the Tatians and all the Encratites ancient heretics (*veteres haeretici*) for prohibiting people to eat certain food, and accuses the pope of lumping together all these impious sects (*impiae sectae*) by introducing a new law concerning food. Calvin wants his readers to rely on the heavenly oracle, and thereby reject the pope’s prohibitions in this regard.¹⁷⁷ In his commentary on Acts 13:2 Calvin speaks of Macedonius (4th century bishop of Constantinople) and his sect, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁸ And, closer to Calvin’s own time, in his dedicatory letter to Radziwil he speaks about Franciscus Stancarus and his sect who were spreading their ideas in Radziwil’s territory.¹⁷⁹ Calvin labels all these groups ‘sects’ for deviating from the Word of God and thereby putting the unity of the church at risk.

Finally, and very interestingly, Calvin does not only apply this understanding of ‘sects’ to deviant groups within the history of the church and in his own time, but also to what was considered to be the only and mainstream church in the West, the Roman Catholic church. When the reformer, in his commentary on Acts 5:21, refers to the chief priest and his own sect who called together the whole council in order to give the impression that they did not make any decisions on their own, he subsequently applies it to the Papists. The latter boast of their lawful councils that should be obeyed as representing the church, but gathering together is not enough unless it is done in the name of Christ.¹⁸⁰ Something similar is found in his commentary on Acts 20:30 where Calvin equates the Papists with the wolves, of which he spoke earlier. Although the Papists reject this name, they draw the believers away by the caprice of men instead of leading them by the Word of God.¹⁸¹ And as the corruption of the law was the origin of sects among the Jews, the Lord has avenged the profanation of his Word in the Papacy with a similar punishment when it was corrupted by various human

¹⁷⁵ Comm. on Acts 17:18, COR XII/2,110,24-26 & 111,5.

¹⁷⁶ Comm. on Acts 6:5, COR XII/1,167,30-31 & 168,1-2.

¹⁷⁷ Comm. on Acts 10:15, COR XII/1,305,6-8, 16-17.

¹⁷⁸ Comm. on Acts 13:2, COR XII/1,365,6-7.

¹⁷⁹ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,7,14-18.

¹⁸⁰ Comm. on Acts 5:21, COR XII/1,149,26-28 & 150,8-9, 18-20.

¹⁸¹ Comm. on Acts 20:30, COR XII/2,191,23-28.

fabrications.¹⁸² Although Calvin never in his commentary on Acts explicitly calls the Roman church a sect (he only equates the Papists with other persons or groups that are called sects), he certainly holds them responsible for breaking up the unity of the faith and the church through their deviance from the Word of God. And what is unclear from his commentary on Acts becomes clear when one follows Calvin's own advice, namely to consult his Institutes when one needs clarity on his doctrinal position on a specific issue.¹⁸³ There he has no qualms in calling the Papists a sect.¹⁸⁴

13.2.4. The unity of the church

From the above it is clear that the unity of the church was of great importance to the man who was not afraid to cross ten seas for this purpose.¹⁸⁵ However, for Calvin it was always a unity in the truth of the Word: doctrine alone is the sacred bond of fraternal unity.¹⁸⁶ In his criticism on the Augsburg Interim, the failed attempt by Emperor Charles V to bring unity between Catholics and Protestants, Calvin says that the truth of the Gospel is the only bond of peace. It is, therefore, of no use for those who are trying to seduce us from the pure profession of the Gospel, to gloss it over with the name of concord.¹⁸⁷ This does not contradict what he says in his commentary on Acts 28:25: Christ is the one and only bond of holy unity.¹⁸⁸ After all, Christ is the content of all doctrine; to say, on the one hand, that Christ is the bond of unity and, on the other hand, that doctrine is the bond of unity, is to say essentially the same, but from different perspectives. And this, in turn, does not conflict with another perspective in the letter to Radziwil, where Calvin says that sincere faith of the Gospel is the bond by which the

¹⁸² Comm. on Acts 23:6, COR XII/2,235,21-24.

¹⁸³ CO 2,1-4.

¹⁸⁴ See e.g. Inst. 4.5.17, 4.7.25.

¹⁸⁵ Letter 1619, CO 14,313-314. For more on Calvin's view on church unity from his commentary on the Epistles to the Corinthians, see E.-M. Faber, 'Mutual Connectedness as a Gift and a Task: On John Calvin's Understanding of the Church', 132-140. Unity is also a recurring theme in Calvin's sermons on Acts – see e.g. serm. on Acts 4:32-37, SC 8,113,23 & 114,17-18; serm. on Acts 5:7-15, SC 8,138,8-9 (*pour signifier que le principal de nostre chrestienté est que nous vivions en bonne paix et concorde fraternelle tous ensemble*). Satan knows that God cannot rule among us unless there is peace and harmony (*paix et concorde*), serm. on Acts 6:1-3, SC 8,196,19-20.

¹⁸⁶ Comm. on Acts 15:1, COR XII/2,26,2-3; see also comm. on Acts 23:6, COR XII/2,235,19-20. There is a clear difference in emphasis between Calvin and Erasmus on this point. Peace and unity are fundamental concepts in Erasmus' understanding of the church, and although he does base this in Christ, his emphasis is more on the outcome, rather than on the foundation. Calvin, on the other hand, starts with the foundation – the doctrine of Christ – which leads to the outcome of peace and unity.

¹⁸⁷ *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,591; see also *Admonitio paterna*, CO 7,275, where Calvin asks the question: "... what greater violation of unity than when purity of doctrine is adulterated, and agreement in it destroyed, and Christ, in consequence, torn as it were to pieces?"

¹⁸⁸ Comm. on Acts 28:25, COR XII/2,313,6. "We hear the apostle exhorting us to be 'of one heart, of one mind' but in Christ", *Admonitio paterna*, CO 7,260.

godly have been united.¹⁸⁹ In this regard it is interesting that, whereas Calvin several times calls doctrine the soul of the church, there is one instance where he calls faith the soul of the church (*fides Ecclesiae anima est*), and nothing is more characteristic of faith than agreement (*consensus*).¹⁹⁰

From this foundation of the unity of faith, which is essentially a unity of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, Calvin can also speak about the unity in a broader, and sometimes looser, sense. On this foundation those who were unclean and alienated from the kingdom could be united with the holy seed of Abraham.¹⁹¹ Thus, through the doctrine of Jesus Christ both Jews and Gentiles find unity in the one church. On the foundation of the doctrine of the apostles, with which Acts 2:42 deals, Calvin can furthermore say that the believers were truly united among themselves with brotherly love, and evidence of this was found in the fact that the rich sold their goods to help the poor.¹⁹² And on this same basis not only individual believers but also whole churches were united. Because after the Samaritans were brought to faith by the preaching of Philip, God sends Peter and John to confer the Spirit on them. And he does this in order to foster brotherly union between the church of Samaria and the church of Jerusalem.¹⁹³

13.3. Conclusion

For Calvin the analogy between, on the one hand, the church and her enemies in the book of Acts, and on the other hand, the church and her enemies in of his own time, is very real. In the book of Acts the reader is presented with a picture of the church who remains true to the Word of God, the doctrine of the apostles. This is the source and reason for her unity. Despite the enemy's persecution and the dispersion of the believers as a result thereof, nothing can break up this unity, which the church has in Christ, her Head. This picture is sharply contrasted with a picture of the false church and the sects. They persecute the true believers and try to break up the unity. However they might boast in the name of church, the contrast between them and the true church could not be greater – they are as far apart as heaven is from hell, and light from darkness.

All of this Calvin sees in the ecclesial situation of his own day. The Papists are the sect, the false church, and the ones who persecute the true believers. They boast in the name of church,

¹⁸⁹ Letter to Radziwil, COR XII/1,5,6-7.

¹⁹⁰ Comm. on Acts 23:6, COR XII/2,235,15-16.

¹⁹¹ Comm. on Acts 14:27, COR XII/2,24,26-28; see also comm. on Acts 13:47, COR XII/1,403,27-29.

¹⁹² Comm. on Acts 2:44, COR XII/1,90,6-8.

¹⁹³ Comm. on Acts 8:14, COR XII/1,240,29-33 & 241,1-2.

but they have deviated from the Word of God, and have replaced the only Head of the church with the pope. But the images of the church, as he finds them in the book of Acts, helps Calvin to be encouraged and to encourage the readers of his commentary, especially his royal dedicatees. The rebuilt house, the revived body and the restored kingdom are powerful images, which help him draw encouragement and strength from the history of the early church. In his commentary he tries to paint these images as vividly and as lively as he possibly can, so that they can serve as examples for the reborn church of the sixteenth century.

14. THE SACRAMENTS

Of the two marks of the church usually identified by Calvin, doctrine has received more than its share of attention in this study. The same cannot be said of the second mark, the sacraments.¹ This is partly due to the fact that Calvin, in his commentary on Acts, spends relatively little time on this mark. And this fact is emphasized further by the scant attention he has for the sacrament that, due to its controversial nature in the time of the Reformation, has traditionally received the most attention from Calvin scholars, namely Holy Supper.² Interestingly, the same can be seen in Chrysostom – in his homilies on Acts he rarely speaks about the Eucharist, but all the more about baptism. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, not to give a general description of Calvin's view of the sacraments, and subsequently try to prove it from the commentary of Acts by way of a few sporadic examples. The purpose is rather to discuss those elements that do receive proper attention from the reformer in his commentary on Acts, some of which raise interesting perspectives.

14.1. The nature of the sacraments

In his commentary on Stephen's words about God's covenant with Abraham and the accompanying sign of circumcision, Calvin says the following:

Let us note only this, that God first of all promises to Abraham the things that he later confirms by circumcision, so that we may realize that, unless signs are preceded by the Word, they are empty and worthless. Let us also take note that a useful doctrine is

¹ For more on Calvin's view on the sacraments, see S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1943), 177-198; W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1956), 211-282; A. Ganoczy, *Ecclesia Ministrans: Dienende Kirche und Kirchlicher Dienst bei Calvin* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 75-94; Ch. Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville / London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 271-288.

² For references to the Holy Supper in the commentary on Acts, see comm. on Acts 1:11, 2:42, 6:14, 7:40, 19:5, and 20:7, and only the first of these references approaches any semblance of a discussion of Holy Supper; the rest are merely short references in broader discussions. D.F. Wright, 'Calvin's Commentary and Sermons on Acts 1-7: A Comparison', in *Calvin, Beza and Later Calvinism. Calvin Studies Society Papers 2005* (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2006), 293-299, shows that in the sermons Calvin spends much more time on the sacraments than in his commentary. F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody: the Church, a History of Divine Protection* [Reformed Historical Theology, volume 12] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 181-182, comments that the emphasis on the church's teaching ministry outweighs Calvin's concern with the sacraments in his lectures on the Minor Prophets. For further reading on Calvin's view on Holy Supper, see T.J. Davis, *The Clearest Promises of God: the Development of Calvin's Eucharistic Teaching* [AMS Studies in Religious Tradition, vol. 1] (New York: AMS Press, 1995); B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993); W. Janse, 'Calvin's Eucharistic Theology: Three Dogma-historical Observations', in *Calvinus sacramentorum literarum interpres: Conference Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research* [Reformed Historical Theology, vol. 5], ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 37-69.

contained in the word *covenant*, viz. that God makes a covenant with us in the sacraments, to make known his love towards us. Now if that is true, first, they are not only signs of outward profession before men, but they also have the effect of confirming inward faith in the sight of God; secondly, they are not empty forms, because God, who is true, represents nothing in them that he does not perform.³

This citation offers a good entrance into Calvin's thought on the nature of the sacraments in his commentary on Acts.

To start with, there is the element of the priority of Word over sign: unless signs are preceded by the Word, they are empty and worthless.⁴ Already when Calvin discusses the four marks of the church in Acts 2:42, he says that the Supper is added to doctrine as a confirmation (*confirmatio*).⁵ This principle subsequently recurs in different forms. Twice (on Acts 10:37 and 13:24) Calvin comments in a similar fashion on the fact that John 'preached baptism' (*quod Ioannes Baptismum praedicaverit* and *quod praedicavit baptismum*); twice he calls on his readers to take note of this expression.⁶ His appeal to every baptizer is not to remain silent, because without teaching the sign is worthless.⁷ In another instance where he talks about 'the baptism of John', he says that Luke summarizes the whole of John's ministry in this expression, not only because doctrine is bound to baptism (*baptisma annexa est doctrina*), but also because it is the foundation and head without which baptism would be an empty and dead ceremony.⁸ That is then also the heart of his resentment of the Papal view on the sacraments: they have buried preaching, and only recite the sacraments with magical mutterings.⁹ In his sermon on Acts 2:39-40 Calvin says that the sacraments are nothing and have no power except insofar as they are authorized by the Word and stamped by it. It is like money that cannot be circulated without the sign and mark of the prince.¹⁰ This principle of the priority of Word

³ Comm. on Acts 7:8, COR XII/1,183,22-29.

⁴ S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvin*, 181; W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 213; W. Janse, 'The Sacraments', in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 347. See also *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,493 (*sunt enim doctrinae appendices*); CO 7,494 (*quum evangelii sint sigilla*); *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,627.

⁵ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,88,25; see also comm. on Acts 8:36, COR XII/1,260,15-16.

⁶ Comm. on Acts 10:37, COR XII/1,321,1-2; comm. on Acts 13:24, COR XII/1,380,26.

⁷ Comm. on Acts 13:24, COR XII/1,380,28-29.

⁸ Comm. on Acts 18:25, COR XII/2,149,18-21; this is actually an interesting argument: saying that baptism is dependent on doctrine, and that without doctrine it would be an empty and dead ceremony, but nonetheless summarizing John's ministry with the name of the ceremony, rather than with the name of doctrine on which the ceremony is dependent.

⁹ Comm. on Acts 10:37, COR XII/1,321,6-8; see also Inst. 4.14.4 & 7.

¹⁰ Sermon on Acts 2:39-40, SC 8,29,3-7: *Comme nous voyons une monnoye qui ne peult avoir mise, sinon qu'elle soit marquée du signe et de la marque du prince*. See also sermon on Acts 7:8-9, SC 8,255,31-33 & 256,15-20.

over sign not only applies to the sacraments, but also to other signs and ceremonies.¹¹ When Agabus bound his hands and feet with Paul's girdle, he does not only present a spectacle in silence, but links it with the Word (*sed Verbum annectit*), by which he teaches the faithful the value and purpose of the ceremony.¹²

In the citation given at the beginning of this paragraph Calvin also makes a statement about outward profession and inward faith. This external/internal principle is very important in his understanding of the nature of the sacraments. W. Janse says that "Calvin's concept of the sacraments is marked by the duality of external and internal, visible and invisible, perceptible to the senses and perceptible to the mind, sign and thing, physical and spiritual, mouth and heart..."¹³ For Calvin it is important that both parts of the duality are kept together and a balance is maintained (*sed modus tenendus est*).¹⁴ Therefore he is, on the one hand, pastorally critical of many godly men who, out of fear of putting their trust in the outward sign, weaken the power of the sacraments too much; after all, Calvin says, the sacraments do not lack their own efficacy and power.¹⁵

On the other hand, however, the reformer reserves most of his criticism for those who hold to the external sign, and have little or no regard for the internal truth.¹⁶ Thomas de Vio Cajetan, although not despising the internal effect of the work of the Spirit, is a good example of someone who puts substantial emphasis on the visible and sensory nature of the signs in the book of Acts. For him the work of the Spirit is clearly something manifest to the senses.¹⁷ But according to Calvin God does not waste time with external rites except in so far as they are symbols of the heavenly truth – this he says in connection with the tabernacle that had to be built according to the heavenly pattern or archetype.¹⁸ But because of the material outlook of the people of Israel they only grasped the shadow instead of the very substance (*pro corpore ipso umbram*).¹⁹ They thought that they possessed righteousness in sacrifices, and that they had true cleansing by washings, and that God was pleased with them when they had gone

¹¹ W. Janse, 'The Sacraments', 346.

¹² Comm. on Acts 21:11, COR XII/2,201,11-13.

¹³ W. Janse, 'The Sacraments', 346.

¹⁴ Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,222,10; in his comm. on Acts 7:30, COR XII/1,196,26-28, Calvin makes clear that this balance has partly to do with the fact that there is a correlation between signs and realities. God accommodates signs to realities by some sort of analogy, and this is quite a common procedure with the sacraments. This he says with regards to the burning bush, which Moses saw.

¹⁵ Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,222,9-12.

¹⁶ See e.g. *Supplex exhortatio*, CO 6,468; CO 6,489; *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,624.

¹⁷ Acts 2:2-3, TdVC, 434; Acts 8:17, TdVC, 448; Acts 13:3, TdVC, 456.

¹⁸ Comm. on Acts 7:44, COR XII/1,213,19-20.

¹⁹ Comm. on Acts 7:44, COR XII/1,212,25-27.

through their external displays. In a word (*in summa*), they forsook the substance and were laying hold of empty shadows.²⁰

However, an interesting question arises from an unexpected corner, when Paul circumcises Timothy out of respect for men and in order to avoid scandal. Calvin does not consider this action to be a sacrament, but as a neutral and indifferent ceremony (*sed ceremonia media et indifferens*). But did Paul have the right to usurp the use of an empty sign, the meaning and force of which had been abolished? Calvin says that, with the coming of Christ, the use of circumcision was not all abolished at once. It remained free until the light of the Gospel would lead to greater understanding.²¹ Paul, according to Calvin, made use of the transitional phase of which was already spoken in paragraph 12.2 of this study. This is the reason why, in this particular case, the use of an empty ceremony was not wrong, but served a bigger purpose. In another instance he also speaks of circumcision as an empty thing, but there he uses it to warn believers that, because their flesh and soul are stained with filthy things, they are not really participating in baptism; therefore he calls on his readers to understand that spiritual washing is the truth of baptism.²²

Behind all of this is the human tendency to transfer all signs of the divine presence into what is solid and earthly, while it is actually God's purpose to lift us up to heaven.²³ When God promises to be present with his people through external symbols, he is actually inviting them above, so that they may seek him in a spiritual way.²⁴ The contrast with the Papists could not be greater: while God wants to lift us up to heaven spiritually by faith, the Papists pull Christ down to earth and consider him physically present in the signs.²⁵ They produce Christ on the altar, just as Numa Pompilius called down his Jupiter Elicius or just as witches bring down the

²⁰ Comm. on Acts 13:39, COR XII/1,395,6-9. In his sermons on Acts Calvin also regularly highlights the importance of holding on to the substance when using the signs – see e.g. serm. on Acts 6:11-15, SC 8,231,14-16; serm. on Acts 7:1-4a, SC 8,244,13-15; serm. on Acts 7:8-9, SC 8,258,15-21 & 28: *Brief, la substance des sacrementz est contenue en Jesus Christ*.

²¹ Comm. on Acts 16:3, COR XII/2,67,21-31.

²² Comm. on Acts 7:51, COR XII/1,219,11-15.

²³ Comm. on Acts 7:40, COR XII/1,207,9-10 & 12-14; see also W. Balke, *Calvijn en de Doperse Radikalen* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1973), 51; C.L Elwood, 'Calvin's Ecclesial Theology and Human Salvation', in *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society, 1509-2009*, ed. M.E. Hirzel & M. Sallmann (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 94-97. In the final sermons on the series on Acts, Calvin repeatedly emphasizes this aspect of *sursum corda* – see e.g. serm. on Acts 7:38b-42, SC 8,335,18-19 & 337,35-40; serm. on Acts 7:42-44, SC 8,356,16-17 & 32-33 & 357,5.

²⁴ Comm. on Acts 7:49, COR XII/1,216,3-5.

²⁵ See *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,623, where Calvin states that few will be found in the Papacy who does not gaze so stupidly on the outward sign as to forget that Christ is to be sought amid the glories of heaven. With a reminder of the *sursum corda* Calvin calls on the readers to lay aside all earthly thoughts of Christ and worship him with minds raised up to heaven.

moon from heaven with their incantations, while Christ invites us to heaven that by faith we may receive life through his flesh and blood.²⁶ The reference to the witches (*sagae*) returns in Calvin's commentary on Acts 10:47. Here he accuses the Papists of superstition for binding the grace of the Spirit to the signs, and thinking that they can lure him out of heaven by their exorcisms, just like the witches thought that they could draw down the moon with their incantations. But they were actually shutting up the Spirit in the signs.²⁷ In a similar vein Calvin accuses the Papists of wanting to drag God out of heaven by shutting Christ up in the bread and the wine²⁸, and of drowning Christ in baptism.²⁹ The Papists believe that Christ and the Spirit are physically present within the signs, and unless anyone has committed mortal sin, they will all receive the truth and the effect with the signs; they attribute some magical power to the sacraments, as if the sacraments are beneficial without faith.³⁰ Without explicitly mentioning it, Calvin is here referring to the Roman view on the working of the sacraments: *ex opere operato*.

However, for the reformer the sacraments do not have any power of salvation shut up in themselves, or any effectiveness by themselves.³¹ The efficacy of the sacraments is dependent on at least three indispensable elements: the power of Christ, the working of the Spirit and faith. Calvin binds them intricately together when he says the following concerning baptism (although this would also apply to the Holy Supper):

Certainly, since the blood of Christ is the one and only expiation for sins, and since it was shed once for this purpose, and the Holy Spirit is cleansing us continually by the sprinkling of it through faith, the honor for this cannot be transferred to the symbol of water, without doing injury to Christ and the Holy Spirit.³²

A short elaboration on each of these three elements will confirm Calvin's view.

Concerning Christ Calvin says that it is not the minister of the sacraments, but the Author of the sacraments that determines its efficacy. Ministers confer the external sign, but Christ is responsible for and fulfills the effect of the sign by the power of his Spirit (this is, for Calvin,

²⁶ Comm. on Acts 1:11, COR XII/1,31,27-31.

²⁷ Comm. on Acts 10:47, COR XII/1,329,17-21.

²⁸ Comm. on Acts 7:49, COR XII/1,216,5-8.

²⁹ Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,223,16-17.

³⁰ Comm. on Acts 8:13, COR XII/1,239,22-25.

³¹ Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,223,10-12.

³² Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,222,4-7.

the essential difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus, of which will be spoken shortly).³³ Baptism is administered in the name of Christ, so that we may know that the sign will be profitable to us only if we seek the power and effect of it in Christ and know that we are washed in baptism, because it is the blood of Christ that washes us; the whole efficacy of baptism is contained in Christ.³⁴ The eunuch's confession of faith in Jesus Christ in Acts 8:37 leads Calvin to say that baptism is founded on Christ, and its power and truth are contained in him.³⁵ Christ is, ultimately, also the goal of baptism (*proprius baptismi scopus*), and for that matter, of both the sacraments.³⁶

Besides Christ, the Author of the sacraments, Calvin also highlights the prominent place of the Holy Spirit: when it comes to the formal cause (of the washing away of sins in baptism) the Holy Spirit actually plays the leading role.³⁷ In this he echoes Chrysostom who says that the Spirit is the essential part of baptism, because the water only has effect through the Spirit.³⁸ For Calvin an intriguing question is raised when Peter and John, after the Samaritans had been baptized, came down from Jerusalem to pray for them so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. The question on Calvin's mind is: have they not already received the Spirit in baptism? For him there is only one of two options: baptism must either be an empty thing, devoid of all power and grace, or it has from the Holy Spirit whatever efficacy it does possess. Calvin is clearly in favor of the latter option, for in baptism we are washed from our sin, but Paul teaches that our washing is the work of the Holy Spirit; the water of baptism is the sign of the blood of Christ, but Peter says that it is the Spirit by whom we are washed in the blood of Christ; in baptism our old man is crucified so that we are raised up into newness of life, but what is the source of this except the sanctification of the Spirit? Nothing will be left of baptism if it is separated from the Spirit.³⁹ Calvin's answer to the conundrum raised in this passage in Acts 8 is that Luke is here speaking about the special gifts of the Spirit, and not about the general grace of the Spirit. For him the efficacy of the sacraments depends on the work of the Spirit; even when the Spirit of God becomes active long after the sacraments had been administered, they may still begin to realize their efficacy.⁴⁰

³³ Comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,334,31-33; see also comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,23,9-10.

³⁴ Comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,82,30-34 & 83,12-15; see also comm. on Acts 21:20, COR XII/2,204,36-37; comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,223,1-7.

³⁵ Comm. on Acts 8:37, COR XII/1,261,18-19.

³⁶ Comm. on Acts 10:48, COR XII/1,330,5.

³⁷ Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,222,17-18; for more on the role of the Spirit in the sacraments, see W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 223-228.

³⁸ *Hom. 1*, PG 60,21.

³⁹ Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,1-8.

⁴⁰ Comm. on Acts 8:13, COR XII/1,240,1-2.

Finally there is also the internal human disposition, the reaction of faith.⁴¹ Even with regards to other rites the internal disposition is indispensable. For example, on two occasions in his commentary Calvin speaks about kneeling during prayer. And in both instances he makes clear that the inward attitude is most important in prayer. As often as we go down on our knees we must make sure that the inward submission of the heart corresponds to the ceremony, so that it may not be false and ineffectual.⁴² This principle applies in particular to the sacraments. After a prolonged discussion in Acts 7:49 of how God is present with his people, Calvin concludes that God's dwelling with his people does not mean that he is contained in one place. Rather, when his promises are accepted in faith, then God listens to us and gives us his power in the sacraments, as if he was present. But if we do not reach up to him in faith, he will not be present for us.⁴³ The promises offered to us by the Lord in the sacraments are not useless, provided that we seek from him in faith whatever the sacraments promise.⁴⁴ Faith draws a true connection from the external sign to the internal effect, finding in the sign the promise of Christ.⁴⁵ For Calvin faith – and a profession of faith – is of such importance that, as a general rule, he puts it before baptism, and calls baptism an appendix of faith (*est enim Baptismus quasi fidei appendix*).⁴⁶ This applies in particular to strangers (i.e. the Gentiles), for they ought to be engrafted into the body of the church by faith before receiving the sign.⁴⁷

It is precisely the weakness of this very faith that is the reason why God instituted the sacraments.⁴⁸ God uses the instruments and means he knows to be suitable, because he wants them to be props (*adminiculum*) for our weakness.⁴⁹ In this way God accommodates himself to our ignorance, so that we may, in a sense, see him by way of figures. Under the law there were many such symbols, and today we have baptism and the Supper, and even the external preaching of the Word.⁵⁰ As long as the nature of these aids, as described above, is kept in

⁴¹ For references to faith as necessary for the efficacy of the sacraments, see e.g. comm. on Acts 1:11, COR XII/1,31,26; comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,14; comm. on Acts 19:4, COR XII/2,155,6-7. The same can be found in *Cum Antidoto*, CO 7,494-495.

⁴² Comm. on Acts 9:40, COR XII/1,290,22-24; comm. on Acts 20:36, COR XII/2,195,24-26.

⁴³ Comm. on Acts 7:49, COR XII/1,216,23-28.

⁴⁴ Comm. on Acts 8:13, COR XII/1,239,25-30.

⁴⁵ Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,23,25-28.

⁴⁶ Comm. on Acts 8:37, COR XII/1,260,26-30; see something similar in his comm. on Acts 10:47, COR XII/1,329,1-2.

⁴⁷ Comm. on Acts 8:12, COR XII/1,238,8-11.

⁴⁸ W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 213-214.

⁴⁹ Comm. on Acts 22:16, COR XII/2,222,19-23.

⁵⁰ Comm. on Acts 7:40, COR XII/1,206,33-36; for more on God's accommodation, see A. Huijgen, *Divine Accommodation in John Calvin's Theology: Analysis and Assessment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); F.A.V. Harms, *In God's Custody*, 182.

mind, Calvin allows freedom to the church to use different rites of administering the sacraments.⁵¹

14.2. Baptism

In his commentary on Acts baptism certainly receives more of Calvin's attention than the Holy Supper. This can be ascribed to the fact that the Biblical text of the Acts of the Apostles speaks about baptism more often than about the Supper. After all, Acts is the history of the beginning of the church, and baptism is the rite for initiation into the church. Therefore, it is not surprising that baptism gets more attention than the Lord's Supper. It should be added that Calvin does not so much discuss baptism in general, but that he rather discusses very specific aspects of this sacrament. Three aspects related to baptism stand out.

14.2.1. The Anabaptists and infant baptism

The Anabaptists⁵², also called fanatics (*fanatici homines*)⁵³ and ignorant men (*indocti homines*)⁵⁴, are the primary targets of Calvin's criticism when he talks about infant baptism.⁵⁵ Calvin does not deny the general rule that people cannot be admitted to baptism without professing their faith. They should not receive the sign of baptism before they have been engrafted into the body of the church, and they should not be engrafted into the church before they have testified that they believe in Christ.⁵⁶ Twice in his commentary on Acts 8 – the baptism of the Samaritans as well as the baptism of the eunuch – Calvin acknowledges this general rule. But in both instances he goes on to qualify the general rule by criticizing the Anabaptists for using these examples to prove that infant baptism is wrong.

Calvin also accuses the Anabaptists of allegorizing Scripture to justify their view on baptism. In his commentary on Acts 3:25, where Peter refers to God's promise that he will be the God of Abraham's seed, Calvin says that the Anabaptists interpret the sons of Abraham allegorically, as though God had no regard to Abraham's offspring. The contrary is true,

⁵¹ See Calvin's discussion in comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,4-19, as well as his comm. on Acts 8:38, COR XII/1,262,17-21.

⁵² See comm. on Acts 2:39, COR XII/1,84,28; comm. on Acts 8:12, COR XII/1,238,11; comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,155,25.

⁵³ Comm. on Acts 8:37, COR XII/1,260,32; *furioso homines* in comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,155,24.

⁵⁴ Comm. on Acts 10:47, COR XII/1,329,6.

⁵⁵ See W. Balke, *Calvijn en de Doperse Radikalen*, 101-109; S. van der Linde, *De Leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn*, 187-189.

⁵⁶ See comm. on Acts 8:12, COR XII/1,238,10-11, together with comm. on Acts 8:37, COR XII/1,260,28-29; see the same in comm. on Acts 10:47, COR XII/1,329,2-5.

however. God's adoption extends to the children as well as the fathers, and thus the grace of salvation may be extended to those who are not yet born.⁵⁷ Again, in his commentary on Acts 13:33, Calvin accuses 'certain fanatics' for making allegories out of everything by saying that the words "unto our children" are not to be understood in terms of descendants but rather in terms of faith. Calvin's position is clear: "I take the opposite view that those who are born children of Abraham according to the flesh, are also to be regarded as God's spiritual children, unless they cut themselves off by their own unfaithfulness."⁵⁸

For Calvin the crux of the matter is membership of the church. Only the members of the family of the church are distinguished by Christ with the sign of baptism. That being said, it should be kept in mind that adults and children acquire membership in different ways. Adults are engrafted into the church by faith, but children of the godly are born sons of the church and are numbered among the members of Christ from birth. God adopts us on the principle that he is also the Father of our children.⁵⁹ For that reason, Calvin says, the men and women in Samaria who professed their faith were admitted to baptism on this condition that their families were at the same time consecrated to God. Calvin quotes Genesis 17:7 to proof this assertion.⁶⁰ The believers' children, who are born within the church, are members of the family of God from the womb, and therefore they should not be defrauded of the external sign. We should not take away what God has granted them.⁶¹ Calvin considers those who are opposing infant baptism as waging war on God, because they cruelly reject from the church those who are adopted into the church by God's promise, and they deprive of the external symbol those whom God honors with the name of sons.⁶² Calvin's conclusion is: even if faith is required in the case of adults, it is wrong to carry this over to children, since the pattern for them is quite different.⁶³

However, it is important to add a qualifier, typical of the man who is constantly searching for the middle way. If an adult person does not receive Christ in faith, both as the One who was once promised and at last revealed, he or she boasts in vain of being baptized as an infant. For

⁵⁷ Comm. on Acts 3:25, COR XII/1,111,24-29.

⁵⁸ Comm. on Acts 13:33, COR XII/1,387,15-18 & 21-23.

⁵⁹ Comm. on Acts 8:37, COR XII/1,260,34-35 & 261,1-5.

⁶⁰ Comm. on Acts 8:12, COR XII/1,238,12-15; another text which Calvin deems clear proof of infant baptism is Acts 2:39, a passage that sufficiently refutes the Anabaptists who deny baptism to children of the faithful while they are still infants, as though they are not members of the church, comm. on Acts 2:39, COR XII/1,84,27-29.

⁶¹ Comm. on Acts 10:47, COR XII/1,329,9-13; see also W. Balke, *Calvijn en de Doperse Radikalen*, 102-103.

⁶² Comm. on Acts 11:17, COR XII/1,336,17-20.

⁶³ Comm. on Acts 8:37, COR XII/1,261,4-5.

Christ initiates infants to himself with the purpose that they would become his disciples as soon as their age and understanding will allow. For Calvin it is imperative that, once a person reaches the age of discernment, he or she will be able to know the power of the Spirit.⁶⁴

As has already been argued in chapter 1 of this study, Calvin's arrows of criticism in his commentary on Acts are mainly aimed at the Papists. However, baptism, and infant baptism in particular, is a doctrine the reformer shares with the Papists, although he criticizes the rites surrounding baptism in the Roman Catholic Church. The bulk of his criticism related to infant baptism is saved for the Anabaptists. They are his opponents when he defends the right of the children of believers to be baptized as a sign that they belong to the church of Jesus Christ.

14.2.2. John's baptism

David C. Steinmetz has shown very clearly that Calvin's discussion of the baptism of John, both in his Institutes and in his commentaries, was not an isolated discussion.⁶⁵ Apart from the men of old (*veteres*; he mentions Chrysostom and Augustine by name)⁶⁶ to whom the reformer explicitly refers, there was also a medieval and intra-Protestant background to this seemingly innocuous matter. The question about the differences and similarities between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus occupied the minds of medieval theologians, such as Peter Lombard and Gabriel Biel, but it also featured in a brief, though heated, discussion between Huldrych Zwingli and Balthasar Hubmaier from May to November of 1525.⁶⁷ This issue even appears as one of the propositions that was discussed during the Friday morning meetings, the *congregations*, of the pastors of Geneva.⁶⁸

Against the medieval tradition, which said that although John in his baptism used the proper matter (water) he did not use the proper form (baptism performed in the name of the Trinity), Zwingli argued that the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus were similar, not only in matter but also in form. The reformer of Zurich accused the medieval tradition (and thereby the Roman Catholic Church) of treating the formula of baptism in the name of the Trinity as some kind of formula of incantation, by way of which the baptism of Jesus conferred grace *ex opere operato*, while the baptism of John, due to the absence of the Trinitarian formula, could

⁶⁴ Comm. on Acts 8:37, COR XII/1,261,26-28 & 262,1-4.

⁶⁵ D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 157-171.

⁶⁶ Inst. 4.15.7, CO 2,965, and comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,155,9. Chrysostom considers the baptism of John to be incomplete, see *hom.* 40, PG 60,284.

⁶⁷ D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 157.

⁶⁸ E.A. de Boer, *The Genevan School of the Prophets* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, No. DXII] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012), 287-288.

not do this. Besides, Zwingli was not even convinced that the Trinitarian formula was absent from John's baptism. He referred to the baptism of Jesus himself to prove that John's baptism did, in fact, have a Trinitarian character: the Father's voice was heard, the Son was baptized, and the Spirit descended like a dove. In Zwingli's view John's baptism continues in the church until this day; to follow Christ is to be baptized by John.⁶⁹

With Zwingli's criticism of the medieval position, one would expect someone from the Roman Catholic side to respond. However, the response came from the Anabaptist side, in the person of Balthasar Hubmaier. He did not see any continuity between the baptism of John and that of Jesus, but for a completely different reason than the medieval theologians. He considered John to be part of the law and the Old Testament. John's preaching was filled with the curse of the law, sin and death, and not with the Gospel. Therefore he sent his disciples to Jesus where they could find comfort, Spirit, heaven and life. The baptism of John signified the confession of sins; the baptism of Jesus Christ signified their forgiveness.⁷⁰ To remain in the baptism of John, was to remain in the reality of the old covenant, which, for Hubmaier, was a bygone reality. Zwingli retorted that John did preach the Gospel, and that there was no better Gospel than the one preached by John when he called out: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."⁷¹

It is against this background, sketched very briefly in the preceding paragraphs, that the reader begins to understand why Calvin devotes such lengthy discussions to the baptism of John in several passages of his commentary on Acts. The importance of this issue is articulated well by Steinmetz:

John the Baptist stands between the two testaments and a number of crucial issues intersect in him. How one views the role of John in the Gospel narrative affects in important ways how one views the nature of the history of salvation, the character of the sacraments, and the validity of infant baptism.⁷²

⁶⁹ D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 157-162.

⁷⁰ Calvin shows his knowledge of this debate when, in his commentary on Acts 13:24, he says that, when John's baptism is called the 'baptism of repentance', the remission of sins is not excluded. By this way of speaking Luke is taking into account John's specific context, seeing that John's baptism was a preparation for the faith in Christ, comm. on Acts 13:24, COR XII/1,380,23-26.

⁷¹ D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 162-164.

⁷² D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 157.

Already in his commentary on Jesus' words in Acts 1:5 Calvin makes his position abundantly clear: the view that there was a distinction between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus is frivolous (*frivolum est*).⁷³ The belief of the men of old that the baptisms of John and Christ were different was false and wrong.⁷⁴ Calvin thus follows the position taken earlier by Zwingli, but what were his reasons for this? For Calvin the discussion about the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus was not a dispute about baptism, but rather a comparison between the person of John and the person of Jesus. When John said that he was baptizing with water, he was not saying anything about the nature of his baptism, but more about himself.⁷⁵ John was only a minister of the baptism of water, but Jesus Christ was the Author of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Closely related to the issue of person is the issue of office: John was sent to baptize with water and he faithfully fulfilled that particular office, while it was given to the Son to baptize with the Spirit, and at that point in time (just before Pentecost) he still had to perform that duty.⁷⁶ Just as there is a distinction between the sign and the reality, so it is also worthwhile to distinguish between the minister and the author. It is man who serves the sign, but it is Christ who delivers the reality signified in the sign.⁷⁷ So, the baptism of John did not differ from the baptism of Jesus Christ, but the person and office of John was different from that of Christ.

For Calvin this does not only apply to John the Baptist, but also to the apostles, and ultimately to every other minister of the sacraments. Ministers confer the external sign of water, but Christ fulfills the effect of the sign by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁸ Ministers ought to speak in such a way about themselves that they concede to Christ everything that is prefigured in baptism. All that is left to ministers is the outward administration (*praeter externam administrationem*). The titles given to baptism in Scripture, e.g. the laver of regeneration, a washing from sin, or participation in the death and burial of Christ, says nothing about the one administering the external sign, but it says everything about Christ who makes the sign effective.⁷⁹ Calvin is very

⁷³ Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,22,29-31; see also comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,334,34 & 335,1-3.

⁷⁴ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,155,9-12.

⁷⁵ Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,22,31 & 23,1-3; see also comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,334,23-25, as well as Inst. 4.15.8, CO 2,966.

⁷⁶ Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,22,10-13.

⁷⁷ Comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,334,25-29; see an interesting remark in comm. on Acts 13:24, COR XII/1,380,21-23, where Calvin calls John the originator / author of a new and unaccustomed baptism (*Ioannes novi et insoliti baptismi author fuit*), before changing his mind and deciding to rather speak of him as the minister of it (*vel potius minister*).

⁷⁸ Comm. on Acts 11:16, COR XII/1,334,31-33.

⁷⁹ Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,23,3-6; see also D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in context*, 164. Johann Spangenberg expressed similar views when he said: "Between the baptisms of John and Christ there is no other difference than that John is merely a servant and aid but Christ is the Master, Lord and true Foreman", in E. Chung-Kim and T.R. Hains, ed., *Acts* [Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI] (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), 7.

cautious of robbing Christ of his honor when we forget this distinction; this distinction discourages man from appropriating to himself what properly belongs to God.

For Calvin the baptism of John and the baptism administered by the apostles were the same, because it contained the same doctrine: both baptized unto repentance, both for the remission of sins, and both in the name of Christ from whom repentance and remission of sins proceed.⁸⁰ John's baptism was a sign of repentance and remission of sins, which is exactly what we today receive in our baptism.⁸¹ It was a token and pledge of the same adoption and the same newness of life, which we receive in our baptism today. The resemblance and correspondence to each other is excellent, and there is symmetry and similarity of all parts, which forces us to admit that it is the same baptism. Calvin provides two powerful proofs to underscore his position. Firstly, Christ did not re-baptize those who joined him from John, something one would have expected if there were such fundamental and principal differences between the baptism of John and that of Christ. And secondly, Christ himself was baptized by John, so that he might associate with us by that visible symbol; if we admit that there is a fundamental difference between the baptisms of John and Christ, then we loose our common baptism with the Son of God.⁸² For Calvin there is an uninterrupted continuity between the baptism of John, the baptism administered by the apostles, and the baptism we receive today: the human ministers may differ, but the Author and content of the sacrament of baptism have remained the same throughout.

However, what to do with the challenge posed by Acts 19? After all, Paul baptizes the disciples of John after they have already received the baptism of John. Is this not sufficient proof of a fundamental difference between the baptism of John and that of Christ? Calvin mentions some of the ways this problem had been solved in the past.⁸³ The men of old, since they considered the baptisms of John and Christ to be different, did not think it strange that those, who had only been prepared by the baptism of John, were baptized again.⁸⁴ Others, fanatical men (*furiosi homines*), have used this history to introduce Anabaptism, while yet another group understands the word baptism to refer to new instruction.⁸⁵ Calvin agrees with those who deny

⁸⁰ Inst. 4.15.7, CO 2,965.

⁸¹ Comm. on Acts 19:4, COR XII/2,154,33-36.

⁸² Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,155,12-23.

⁸³ For different views held during the time of the Reformation, see E. Chung-Kim and T.R. Hains, ed., *Acts*, 261-267.

⁸⁴ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,155,9-11.

⁸⁵ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,155,24-26; Zwingli was one proponent of the view that baptism here refers to proper instruction, see D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 161 & 164-165.

that the baptism of water was repeated, but he has a different explanation of what actually happened.

In this context, the reformer understands the words ‘Spirit’ and ‘baptism’ to refer to the gifts of the Spirit. From the conclusion of this history, where the disciples of John spoke in tongues and prophesied, Calvin argues that this history is not about the Spirit of regeneration, but about the special gifts of the Spirit, which were distributed in the beginning.⁸⁶ Thus, the Spirit is not spoken of in general terms, but in terms of the visible graces with which God had furnished the kingdom of his Son.⁸⁷ “When they claimed that they knew nothing of the Holy Spirit, they meant (by metonymy) that they knew nothing of the spiritual gifts distributed to the church by the Spirit.”⁸⁸

But why is it initially said that they were baptized in the name of Jesus, and afterwards that they received the Spirit by the imposition of hands? Calvin answers that it is a normal mode of expression in Scripture to set something down briefly (baptism), and then to express better and explain more fully what was obscure due to its brevity (the receiving of the Holy Spirit).⁸⁹ Luke is therefore not relating of two different things, but he follows the form of narrative common to the Hebrews, who first gave the substance, and subsequently explained it more fully.⁹⁰

Some questions do, however, remain. In one sense Calvin describes the relationship between the baptism of John and that of Jesus in terms of salvation-history – John came first to fulfill his office, and afterwards came Jesus to fulfill his office. This is most evident when Calvin, in his commentary on Acts 1:5, says that Christ still needs to perform his duty of baptizing with the Spirit. He clearly understands this duty to be the sending of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, with the accompanying gifts.⁹¹ Thus, there is historical progress from John to Jesus, and further to Pentecost. From John the apostles only received the beginning, though not a vain beginning, and now the fulfillment of John’s baptism was at hand in the sending of the

⁸⁶ Comm. on Acts 19:2, COR XII/2,153,12-14.

⁸⁷ Comm. on Acts 19:2, COR XII/2,154,1-6; Johann Spangenberg holds a similar view and his description is worth citing: “These disciples are not talking about the being or nature of the Holy Spirit or about the common gifts that he works in human beings but rather about the extraordinary, remarkable gifts that he worked in the apostles and the believers after Christ’s resurrection and ascension. It is as if they wanted to say, ‘That the Holy Spirit exists, *this* we obviously know from Scripture; but that he appeared visibly in fiery tongues on believers, *that* we have not heard’”, in E. Chung-Kim and T.R. Hains, ed., *Acts*, 262.

⁸⁸ D.C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 165.

⁸⁹ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,156,9-14.

⁹⁰ Inst. 4.15.18, CO 2,973.

⁹¹ Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,22,10-13.

Spirit on Pentecost.⁹² It is in this sense that Calvin highlights the fact that he is not talking about the Spirit in general, but specifically about the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.

In another sense, however, Calvin describes the relationship between the baptism of John and that of Jesus in terms of a theological priority of the latter over the former – John is only the minister of the sign, while Jesus Christ is the Giver of all that is set forth in baptism. In this case the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus are both part of the same act or ceremony, although differing in the weight of their importance. From men we receive the baptism of water, while Christ does his part by baptizing us with the Spirit.⁹³

Especially in the commentary on Acts 1:5 and 19:1-5 these two lines tend to get mixed up, probably due to the nature of the texts under discussion. Calvin makes no real effort to distinguish the different lines, and therefore some uncertainty remains.

14.2.3. The laying on of hands

In this last paragraph on baptism the laying on of hands will be discussed. This ceremony was already mentioned briefly in paragraph 9.1, as well as in the previous paragraph in the discussion on Acts 19. Its close connection with baptism, especially in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the sacraments, justifies such a discussion.

Calvin wants his readers to carefully and wisely (*sedulo et prudenter*) distinguish perpetual sacraments from temporary ones. In baptism and the Supper the church is presented with those gifts, which we will continue to enjoy to the end of the world, and these can therefore be classified as permanent sacraments. This fundamental distinction is made in a discussion about the laying on of hands, and it enables Calvin to admit that the laying on of hands was a sacrament, although it was only a temporary one.⁹⁴

Calvin identifies at least two broad uses for the laying on of hands: conferring the gifts of the Spirit and presenting someone to God.⁹⁵ In his commentary on Acts 9:17, in a statement approaching some kind of definition, Calvin says that the custom of the imposition of hands

⁹² Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,22,28-29; Calvin's commentary on Acts 13:24 tends more towards this sense.

⁹³ Comm. on Acts 1:5, COR XII/1,23,23-25; Calvin's commentary on Acts 11:16 clearly follows this line.

⁹⁴ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,156,21-22 & 25-29.

⁹⁵ R.C. Zachman, 'Revising the Reform: What Calvin Learned from Dialogue with the Roman Catholics', in *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism. Critique and Engagement, Then and Now*, ed. R.C. Zachman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 179-189, distinguishes three different uses for the laying on of hands: confirmation, restoration of the penitent to full communion with the church, and ordination for an office. See also Calvin's discussion of the sacrament of confirmation in his *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,626-627 & 632, where he acknowledges the use of the laying on of hands for distribution of the gifts of the Spirit and for the consecration of ministers.

was taken over by the apostles from the Jews, either when they were conferring visible graces of the Spirit, or when they were appointing anyone as a minister of the church. In the case of Ananias laying his hands on Paul in this particular verse in Acts 9, Calvin considers both these uses to be present: partly to consecrate Paul to God, and partly to obtain for him the gifts of the Spirit.⁹⁶

However, the laying on of hands as a symbol of presenting someone to God can be used in several different situations. As was already apparent in Acts 9:17, it can be used when appointing someone as a minister of the church; this is also found in Acts 6:6 (where the seven deacons were dedicated to God) and in Acts 13:3 (where the imposition of hands on Paul and Barnabas was for offering them to God and testifying that this office was laid on them by God).⁹⁷ In another instance the laying on of hands is used when a sick person is healed – Paul laid his hands on Publius’ father as a solemn rite of presentation. In this way he presented the man to God, showing that he was humbly asking for his life from God.⁹⁸ And Calvin also does not condemn the laying on of hands by the men of old to confirm adults in the profession of their faith.⁹⁹

However, it is especially the use of this symbol to confer the gifts of the Spirit that has Calvin’s attention as well as his criticism. The reason for this being that, among the Papists, this particular use of the imposition of hands had developed into the (permanent) sacrament of confirmation as an addition to and completion of baptism.¹⁰⁰

In his commentary on Acts 8:15-17 Calvin emphasizes that the Samaritans did not only receive the Spirit with the laying on of hands by Peter and John, but already at the baptism by Philip, for “baptism must either be an empty thing, devoid of all power and grace, or it has from the Holy Spirit whatever efficacy it does possess.”¹⁰¹ Therefore, when Luke is talking here about the imposition of hands by Peter and John, it is not a reference to the general grace of the Spirit by which God regenerates us, but rather to the special gifts of the Spirit that God conferred on

⁹⁶ Comm. on Acts 9:17, COR XII/1,275,14-18.

⁹⁷ Comm. on Acts 6:6, COR XII/1,168,21-23; comm. on Acts 13:3, COR XII/1,366,21-24. See also Calvin’s sermon on Acts 6:13, SC 8,200,18-24.

⁹⁸ Comm. on Acts 28:8, COR XII/2,305,8-11.

⁹⁹ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,156,30-31.

¹⁰⁰ See Calvin’s discussion of the sacrament of confirmation in his *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,626-627, where he explains that the apostles did not lay their hands upon all, but only on some people. Therefore the Papists have no basis to make it a sacrament for all. For more on Calvin’s view on the connection between the laying on of hands and baptism among the Papists, see H.H. van Alten, ‘Die Belang van Onderrig in die Beginfase van die Kerk. Johannes Calvyn as Kategeet in sy Kommentaar op die Boek Handeling’, *Koers* 74/4 (2009): 661-682.

¹⁰¹ Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,1-2.

some for the purpose of adding beauty to the kingdom of Christ.¹⁰² However, this was only temporary. The Papists wrongly changed the temporary sign into a permanent principle and a general sacrament (confirmation). And they even made the sacrilegious assertion that those who have not yet had the laying on of hands (i.e. those who have not yet received the sacrament of confirmation) are only half-Christians (*semichristiani*). In doing this they have taken away what properly belongs to baptism and made it part of their own sacrament; they say that in the sacrament of baptism only sins are forgiven, while in the sacrament of confirmation the Spirit of regeneration is bestowed by means of their rotten oil.¹⁰³ Calvin ends this particular discussion by calling on his readers to remember that the laying on of hands was God's instrument by which he conferred the visible grace of the Spirit on his people at the appropriate time; however, since the church has been deprived of these gifts the act of the imposition of hands is now an empty form.¹⁰⁴ Without the reality the sign means nothing.

In his commentary on Acts 19:5, where Paul baptizes and lays his hands on the disciples of John, Calvin continues this discussion. It is perverse and ridiculous, he says, to retain a sign when the reality has been removed.¹⁰⁵ This is exactly what the Papists have done with their disgusting anointing, which they consider to be a confirmation of baptism. They even consider confirmation to be a sacrament of greater worth than baptism – before confirmation believers are only half complete, and through confirmation they are made perfect. In baptism believers' sins are forgiven, but through confirmation they are armed for the fight by the gifts of the Spirit.¹⁰⁶

14.3. Conclusion

In his commentary on Acts Calvin is much more concerned with establishing the true nature of the sacraments, than with a discussion of practical matters surrounding the sacraments. As long as the nature of these aids is kept in mind, Calvin allows freedom to the church to use different rites of administering the sacraments.¹⁰⁷ His war of words with both the Papists and the Anabaptists on this matter has everything to do with theology, and very little with practice.

¹⁰² Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,11-12

¹⁰³ Comm. on Acts 8:16, COR XII/1,242,31-33 & 243,1-16.

¹⁰⁴ Comm. on Acts 8:17, COR XII/1,243,26-28.

¹⁰⁵ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,156,21-25.

¹⁰⁶ Comm. on Acts 19:5, COR XII/2,157,1-5. See also *Interim adultero-germanum*, CO 7,627, where Calvin says that the words of Christ promise to the believers the continual presence of the Spirit. The Spirit is not brought out by the unction at confirmation.

¹⁰⁷ See Calvin's discussion in comm. on Acts 2:38, COR XII/1,83,4-19, as well as his comm. on Acts 8:38, COR XII/1,262,17-21.

He wants his readers to understand that the Word has priority over the sign, that the external signs point to a heavenly reality, and that God therefore wants to raise our eyes to heaven when he presents us with the sacraments.

Calvin also emphasizes that Christ (the Author of the sacraments) and the Spirit (the One who applies the promises contained in the sacraments) have priority over the human ministers. This is the basis for his argument that there is no fundamental difference between the baptism of John and that of Jesus Christ, except that John as human being can only administer the sign, whereas Jesus Christ presents us with the thing signified. Underlying this argument is, among other things, Calvin's view on the unity of the old and the new covenant, a unity that also sets him on a collision course with the Anabaptists, for whom the fundamental difference between the covenants leads to their rejection of infant baptism.

Despite the fact that the Word has priority over the sacraments, and over the signs in general, Calvin does not neglect the latter. Instead, his treatment of the sacraments serves the useful purpose of sharpening his and his readers' view on the Word and doctrine. The signs, instead of distracting the believers, rather focus them on Christ and the work of the Spirit, through the preaching of the Gospel.

CONCLUSION

The 1543 edition of Calvin's *Institutes* presents its readers with "the high point for the doctrine of the church."¹ What follows afterwards in terms of ecclesiological material, until the final edition of 1559, are minor additions and a reorganization of the parts, although McKee has shown some development in Calvin's ecclesiology – more specifically his view on worship, discipline and ministry – as his work on Scripture influenced his doctrinal thought.² In terms of explicit references, the book of Acts does not add anything substantial to later editions of the *Institutes*.³ A reference to Acts 4:32 is added in *Institutes* 4.1.3 where Calvin discusses the article from the Creed about the 'communion of saints'. Calvin's reference is to Luke's description of the community in which the heart and soul of the multitude of believers were one.⁴ Furthermore, in 4.1.5 there is a new reference to Acts 7:48, where Stephen shows the Jews that God does not dwell in temples made with hands.⁵ And finally, in 4.13.3 Calvin adds a new reference to Acts 23:12 as an illustration of rash vows.⁶ These additions, although certainly valuable, do not fundamentally change Calvin's view on specific aspects of ecclesiology.

If, then, Calvin's ecclesiology had mostly crystalized even before he started working on the book of Acts – or on most other commentaries for that matter⁷ – what could this history of the early church add to his view on the church? And if "Calvin's thought is so often treated as adequately represented by the *Institutes* alone"⁸, does not this *solus* ('the *Institutes* alone') render a treatment of the book of Acts redundant?⁹ At least three things should be kept in mind when trying to answer these questions.

¹ E.A. McKee, 'Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin's *Institutio*: A Methodological Suggestion', in *Probing the Reformed Tradition: Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, ed. E.A. McKee and B.G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 160. B.C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970), 1, says that the bulk of book 4 of the *Institutes* was written for the 1543 edition, and that the rest was taken up by material from the 1536 and 1539 editions. Only in the sections on the sacraments (especially the Supper) and the marks of the church, will the reader find substantial additions.

² E.A. McKee, 'Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin's *Institutio*', 154-172.

³ Only chapters 1-13 of book 4, after which the sacraments (ch. 14-19) and the civil government (ch. 20) follow, were checked to determine whether any additions were made.

⁴ Inst. 4.1.3, CO 2,748.

⁵ Inst. 4.1.5, CO 2,751; this reference from Scripture also appears twice in the section on prayer.

⁶ Inst. 4.13.3, CO 2,926.

⁷ By the time the 1543 edition of the *Institutes* was published, Calvin had only finished his commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans (published in 1540).

⁸ E.A. McKee, 'Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin's *Institutio*', 154.

⁹ For more on the slogan *Calvinus homo unius libri*, see T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 6-35.

Firstly, one should hold to Calvin's purpose with the Institutes. Whereas the first edition of 1536 had a catechetical purpose, providing a simple exposition of the faith for the believers, the letter to the readers of the 1539 edition indicates a different purpose. Calvin writes that his "purpose was to prepare and instruct those who wish to give themselves to the study of theology that they may have easy access to the reading of the Holy Scriptures, make good progress in the understanding of it, and keep to the good and straight path without stumbling."¹⁰ And in the introduction to the 1541 French edition he promises that his work will be a key and entrance to give all children of God access to understand the Holy Scripture well and rightly.¹¹ From the 1539 edition onwards, therefore, it is Calvin's express purpose to provide his readers, theological students as well as all other children of God, with a dogmatic introduction to the reading of Holy Scripture.¹² When one, therefore, accepts that the Institutes is the whole of Calvin and the whole of Calvinism, as Parker disapprovingly quotes Doumergue, then one rejects what Calvin himself intended with the Institutes.¹³ The latter work was intended to provide a key, and thereby an entrance, into Scripture. The key should, as a result, be used to provide the opening into the riches of Scripture, and into the vast treasure (*ingens thesaurus*) of the book of Acts in particular.¹⁴ And then one will probably find that the direction of influence works both ways – just as the Institutes provides an entrance into Scripture, Scripture also enriches Calvin's view on the different *loci* as formulated in the Institutes. What this means for Calvin's ecclesiology will shortly be summarized.

Secondly, one should keep in mind that, whereas the Institutes provides its readers with Calvin's *loci communes*, the (evolving) result of his doctrinal thinking and formulation, the commentaries are the result of Calvin's grappling with the Biblical text in its historical context. Whereas the Institutes reflects Calvin's systematic understanding of the doctrine of Scripture, the commentaries reflect his understanding of a specific scriptural text – never in isolation, as numerous references to other scriptural passages as well as to the Institutes proof¹⁵, but still less determined by the more rigorous structure of the *loci*. This allows the reformer the freedom to explain certain aspects of his view on the church in ways that might just compliment and enrich his more stringent doctrinal work. A good example of this was found in the discussion

¹⁰ CO 1,255-256.

¹¹ CO 3,XXIII; see J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1541 French Edition*, transl. E.A. McKee (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).

¹² F. Wendel, *Calvin, the Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (London: Collins, 1963), 146.

¹³ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, 6.

¹⁴ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,14,20.

¹⁵ See Calvin's commentaries on Acts 6:3, Romans 3:21, 3:28, 1 Corinthians 1:1, 3:9, 3:14, 5:5, 9:5-6, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 5:10, Ephesians 3:18-19, 1 Timothy 2:6, 3:8, 1 Peter 1:20, for explicit references to the Institutes.

on the marks of the church. Calvin generally identifies two marks of the church, the pure preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution. But in his commentary on Acts 2:42, Calvin has no problem in following the text and enumerating four marks (*quatuor notae*) of the church (par. 13.2.2).¹⁶ In summary one can say that Calvin's hermeneutical principle of unfolding the mind of the biblical writer, keeps him from being caught up in any kind of system. This opens the possibility for the Institutes to be enriched by the commentaries.

And thirdly, Calvin did not only expound the text in its historical context, but also in his own (Calvin's) historical context. Although this also applies to the Institutes, the nature of this work (systematically explaining the doctrine of Scripture, and having evolved over more than twenty years) would mean that the degree to which this is true would be less for the Institutes than for the commentaries (or other writings like sermons, tracts and letters). In chapter 1 of this study the historical context of the commentary on Acts was investigated. The place of this commentary in the sequence of other commentaries, the influence of several tracts written during the 1540's, the events in Europe, and the events (or lack thereof) in Geneva – all these elements would have influenced Calvin's understanding of this part of Scripture for his own time, and could therefore also add to his ecclesiology as found in the Institutes.

How, then, does Calvin's ecclesiology in his commentary on the book of Acts, specifically in light of the event of Pentecost, enrich and qualify – and maybe even differ from – his ecclesiology as found in the last book of the Institutes? In the following paragraphs a summary will be given of the most important aspects discovered in Calvin's commentary on Acts, briefly comparing it to the last book of the Institutes. This will be done by chronologically following the chapters of the two systematic parts of this study (chs. 8-14), and occasionally referring to the other chapters.

Book 4 of the Institutes starts with the title "The external means or aims by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein".¹⁷ The society of Christ – better known as union with Christ – plays a central role in Calvin's view on the church in the Institutes. The heart of his ecclesiology in the Institutes is to be found in the communion with Christ.¹⁸ In this study it has been shown that, although Christ is ever-present in Calvin's view on the church in

¹⁶ Comm. on Acts 2:42, COR XII/1,87,23-25.

¹⁷ CO 2,745-746.

¹⁸ G. Plasger, 'Ecclesiology', in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 323; W. van't Spijker, *Bij Calvin in de Leer. Een Handleiding bij de Institutie* (Houten: Den Hertog, 2004), 166.

his commentary on Acts (see par. 3.1 and introduction to ch. 4), the Spirit of Pentecost nevertheless takes center-stage. This became clear, for example, from the discussion about the restoration of the church (par. 12.4). There it was found that Christ, through his death and resurrection, in principle achieved the restoration of all things and that one day he will return to finalize the restoration of all things, but that it is the Spirit's work to apply the restoration in the interim between Christ's ascension and his return. Therefore Calvin can say that, although the Son has gathered some of the church by his preaching before his ascension, the Christian church only began to exist in its proper form when the apostles were endowed with new power (i.e. the Holy Spirit), and started preaching.¹⁹ In this regard Calvin would hold to the same view as Chrysostom, who considered Acts to be the history of what the Spirit said and did (par. 5.2).

In a variety of ways the Spirit is the Guide of the church and the believers. His guidance in preaching, reading and understanding Scripture, both for individual believers and ecclesial meetings, would hardly be a surprising element for anyone with knowledge of Calvin's Institutes. After all, "the Spirit wills to be conjoined with God's Word by an indissoluble bond, and Christ professes this concerning him when he promises the Spirit to his church."²⁰ This the reformer says in the same section where he accuses the Papists for thinking that the church cannot err because it has the Spirit, even when the Word is absent. The inseparability of Word and Spirit is a well known characteristic of the reformer's ecclesiology. A lesser-known aspect that has emerged from Calvin's commentary on Acts, however, is the Spirit's guidance independent of any concrete scriptural teaching. Frequently Calvin would speak about the secret guidance of the Spirit. This aspect was particularly visible in those parts of Acts that deal with the apostles' performing of miracles or with the geographical direction of Paul's missionary journeys. Although never contradicting the Word, the secret guidance of the Spirit shows something of the freedom of God and of the fact that the church and its growth is always a work of God, more specifically the Spirit, and not a result of man's efforts.²¹

In book 4 of the Institutes the gifts of the Spirit appear specifically in the context of Calvin's discussion of the offices: "Those whom the Lord has destined for such high office, he first supplies with the arms required to fulfill it... Accordingly, Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians,

¹⁹ *Argumentum*, COR XII/1,11,27-30.

²⁰ Inst. 4.8.13, CO 2,856; see also Inst. 1.9.1 and 1.9.3.

²¹ See I.J. Hesselink, 'Pneumatology', in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 301.

when he undertook to discuss these offices, first reviewed the gifts in which those who perform the offices ought to excel.”²² This is also the reason why, in this study, the chapter on the offices (ch. 10) follows the one on the gifts (ch. 9). However, Calvin’s commentary on Acts also reveals the reformer’s struggle to understand the extraordinary gifts of which the book of Acts speaks so frequently. Calvin distinguishes between general and extraordinary gifts, but repeatedly chooses to interpret key passages – like Acts 1:5, 2:38, 8:16, 11:16 and 19:1-5 – as referring to extraordinary gifts. His struggle is apparent from two facts. Firstly, it is clear from his ambiguity as to the reasons for the cessation of these gifts. On the one hand Calvin considers the extraordinary gifts as an adornment of the initial stages of the kingdom of Christ, a function that necessarily ended when the church passed the initial stages. On the other hand he says that the ingratitude of the church caused the cessation of the gifts. The reason that is chosen in a particular context also influences his view on whether his readers can expect a recurrence of these gifts. And secondly, Calvin’s struggle also becomes apparent from what appears to be a discrepancy between his exegesis and his subsequent application of these passages. He repeatedly chooses to exegete these passages in terms of the extraordinary gifts, but subsequently applies them to the readers of his commentary in terms of the general gifts of faith, forgiveness of sins and new life. Reality – the fact that the extraordinary gifts have appeared so seldom after the initial stages of the church – brings Calvin to the conclusion that we should not expect a recurrence of the extraordinary gifts in our time. And his theology brings him to apply these passages to what he deems more important than any extraordinary gift: the gifts of faith, forgiveness and new life. His application is, therefore, in line with his basic understanding of the church: union with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Although Calvin’s discussion of church government in his commentary on Acts (ch. 10 of this study) does not render any significant new insights, it does provide a very interesting analogy to what is found in book 4 of the Institutes. In the latter writing Calvin’s positive description of church government and the individual offices is offset by a negative description of the corruption and abuses evident among the Papists of his day.²³ In a less systematic way the same can be found in his commentary on Acts, where the newly instituted government of the restored church is regularly contrasted with the corrupt government of the unbelieving Jews and the synagogue. Calvin can thus draw direct parallels between the Jewish high priest and

²² Inst. 4.3.11, CO 2,784.

²³ Inst. 4.3-4.7.

the pope, and between the synagogue and the papists. This gives the commentary on Acts a liveliness not always possible in a structured book like the Institutes.

In his commentary Calvin does not get tired of emphasizing what he so aptly formulated in the opening statement of Institutes 4.3.1: “Now we must speak of the order by which the Lord willed his church to be governed. He alone should rule and reign in the church ... and this authority should be exercised and administered by his Word alone.”²⁴ The reign of Christ through his Spirit and Word is the only legal rule in the church. This rule is performed through human beings who faithfully proclaim the Gospel. Ambassadors, instruments, servants, and ministers – these are terms Calvin prefers in his commentary on Acts to describe the human ministry of the Word. The presence of angels in several passages in the book of Acts (see in particular Acts 8-10), allows Calvin the opportunity to refute the wish of some that God would speak to them directly from heaven or through the service of angels, rather than through humans. This wish shows ingratitude for God’s choice to make use of human beings.²⁵

As the book of Acts paints a picture of the reborn church after the ascension of Christ, the newly instituted offices are necessarily portrayed within that framework. What Calvin describes as temporary offices in his Institutes²⁶, are still very much alive in the time of Acts. The apostles are described as having the world as their work site. It was their responsibility to form churches everywhere, to keep all believers in the unity of faith, and to establish ministers and pastors in the young churches. Also the temporary offices of evangelists and prophets, considered by Calvin to only function in extraordinary circumstances, were still fully functional in the time of Acts. Especially the office of prophet receives an interesting discussion, as Calvin distinguishes between the office of prophets (explaining and applying Scripture) and the gift of prophesying (foretelling the future). As in the Institutes the permanent offices receive the necessary attention. The core tasks of the elders are teaching and governance. Regarding the deacons, Calvin considers the history of Acts 6 as the creation of deacons. It is therefore not surprising, as McKee has shown, that from the very first edition of the Institutes Acts 6 has functioned as the key text for the institution and function of deacons.²⁷

Chapter 11 of this study, on Calvin’s use of the Word (and correlating concepts), forms the closing piece of the first systematic part. The abundance of the Spirit (“I will pour out”), with

²⁴ Inst. 4.3.1, CO 2,776.

²⁵ See something similar in Inst. 4.3.1.

²⁶ Inst. 4.3.5, CO 2,780.

²⁷ E.A. McKee, ‘Exegesis, Theology, and Development in Calvin’s *Institutio*’, 158-159.

the accompanying gifts and offices, does not mean an abandoning of the Word. Rather, the Spirit's recipe for a healthy church is to preach the Word. Without the Word and its preaching one is left with a body without a soul. The description of doctrine as the soul of the church does not only occur in the commentary on Acts, but also in the Institutes. Also Calvin's use of *doctrina* and *dogma* is similar in both these writings. When these two concepts are used together *doctrina* is used in a positive sense to refer to the teaching of Scripture, while *dogma* is used negatively to refer to false teaching.

What is peculiar to the commentary, however, is to see Calvin's description of the power and efficacy of the Word. The Word grows in both a quantitative sense (more believers added to the church) and a qualitative sense (individual believers make progress in obedience and godliness). The power of the Word also has a negative referent when unbelievers resist the Word. The book of Acts provides the perfect setting for illustrating the active and dynamic power of the Word in both believers and unbelievers. This is an advantage that the Institutes does not have, and could be considered a valuable addition to the latter.

Regarding the membership of the church Calvin, in the Institutes, highlights especially two aspects: in its invisible character the church consists of all the elect, and in its visible character the church is a *corpus permixtum*.²⁸ Neither of these aspects feature very prominently in the commentary on Acts. In the commentary the reader finds a different, and very dominant, characteristic of the membership of the church. The book of Acts describes the breaking down of the dividing wall between Israel and the nations, and the inclusion of the Gentiles into the one church together with the Jews, on the basis of equality. This is a direct result of the outpouring of the Spirit *on all flesh*. The inclusion of the Gentiles is, for the reformer of Geneva, not merely an addendum, but constitutive for the church and the kingdom. Calvin is convinced that the kingdom of Christ can only be established if the Gentiles are united into his holy people. Whereas, under the old covenant, membership of the church was reserved for the Jews only, in the new covenant membership is open to all who believe in Jesus Christ. And even if all the Jews had believed, the Gospel would still have gone out to the Gentiles.

However, the process of growing into one church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, takes time. Here the reader of the commentary is allowed to see the pastoral side of Calvin. In expounding the book of Acts in its specific historical context, Calvin is aware of the fact that

²⁸ Inst. 4.1.7, CO 2,752-753; see G. Plasger, 'Ecclesiology', 323-325; W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1956), 188-191.

the breaking down of the dividing wall and the inclusion of the Gentiles cannot be achieved all at once. Whereas the Institutes give a picture of the church as it should be, the commentary on Acts rather shows the process of the church becoming what it should be. In this process Calvin shows patience with the apostles and all other believers; he allows for time to keep following the ceremonies of the law until the truth of the Gospel would become more clearly known. This process also corresponds with the concept of restoration, which plays an important role in Calvin's commentary. Again, as stated before, whereas the Institutes describe the image of the church as it should be, the book of Acts allows Calvin to describe the process of restoration. This includes that part of the process which took place before the coming of Christ, as well as the part which took place after his ascension, which will continue until his return (see par. 3.2).

It is generally accepted that Calvin, in the early editions of his Institutes, placed a lot of emphasis on the invisible church, consisting of all the elect. This, according to Van't Spijker, can be explained from the situation in France during those years where the visible church proved itself more and more to be a false church; therefore Calvin emphasized the invisible side of the church, known to God and sustained by him.²⁹ In the later editions the emphasis gradually shifts towards the visible church with its marks, but both aspects remain present in the final edition of 1559.³⁰

In Calvin's commentary on Acts the emphasis is almost exclusively on the visible side of the church, which is a direct result of the character of this book. The church is recognizable by the marks, which in the book of Acts amount to four (doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and public prayer). Furthermore, whereas in the Institutes the image of the mother is the dominant image to portray the visible church, Calvin reverts to different images in his commentary on Acts. Three images in particular help him to portray the church as he sees it in the book of Acts: the church as building with its builders, the church as body with its Head, and the church as the kingdom with its King. Christ is the foundation of the living building of the church, which was built up by master builders through the preaching of the Gospel. Christ is the Head of the body of the church, a body that lives by being connected to him from whom all good things flow. And Christ is the King of the spiritual kingdom that takes its primary form in the lives of the believers.

²⁹ W. van't Spijker, *Bij Calvin in de Leer*, 167.

³⁰ See e.g. D.N. Wiley, 'The Church as the Elect', in *John Calvin and the Church. A Prism of Reform*, ed. T. George (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1990), 96-117.

In the commentary on Acts this church is called ‘true’ only when it is contrasted with the false church. Never in the commentary does Calvin call the church true when he describes it positively and without any enemy in sight. Something similar can be seen in the macro-structure of book 4 of the Institutes. Calvin’s description of the church in chapter 1 is offset by a comparison with the false church in chapter 2 and made concrete in the Roman church’s claim to be the true church. Another important description in Calvin’s commentary is the concept of ‘sects’. Although Calvin can use this concept in a neutral, and even positive way, the negative use of this concept is dominant. It refers to different groups who endanger or actually break up the unity of the church. At the end of paragraph 13.2.3 it was shown how the interplay between the Institutes and the commentaries could actually work in practice. Where Calvin, in his commentary only calls the Papists a sect in a derivative sense, the Institutes shows clear examples where the Papists are explicitly called thus.

From the first edition the sacraments were part of the basic structure of the Institutes. The first edition followed the classical structure of Luther’s catechisms – the Law, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the sacraments (the fifth and sixth chapters dealt with the false sacraments and the Christian’s freedom respectively).³¹ In the final edition of the Institutes the sacraments take up a significant part of book 4. In Calvin’s commentary on Acts, however, the sacraments do not feature very prominently, especially not the Lord’s Supper. When Calvin does speak about the sacraments in his commentary, he does so in a general sense and he tends to emphasize the nature of the sacraments: the priority of Word over sign, the external / internal principle, and the *sursum corda* principle. At various times he also shows the importance of the power of Christ, the working of the Holy Spirit and faith. These are indispensable elements in the working of the sacraments. All of these aspects will not be unfamiliar to readers of the Institutes.³²

Baptism, however, features in a way that one would not find in the Institutes. One will, of course, find a discussion of infant baptism and of the laying on of hands in the Institutes.³³ But what is particularly prominent in Calvin’s commentary is his discussion of the difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus. It was shown that this discussion was not an isolated one, but was part of a broader debate among the different confessional groups during the time of the Reformation. For Calvin it was important to show that the baptism of

³¹ F. Wendel, *Calvin, the Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, 112.

³² See Inst. 4.14.

³³ See for infant baptism, Inst. 4.16, and for the laying on of hands, Inst. 4.19.6.

John and that of Jesus does not differ in their nature. The only thing that distinguished these baptisms was the persons that administered them: John and Jesus. This distinction is one between the minister and the author, between man and God. The one only administers the sign, the other one is able to give the reality signified in the sign. Calvin is able to apply this distinction not only to John, but also to every other minister. It discourages man from appropriating to himself what properly belongs to God. In the context of Calvin's conflict with the Papists this is of particular importance.

In the above an attempt was made to briefly portray the results of this study against the backdrop of Calvin's ecclesiology as found in his Institutes. This has shown that, although Calvin's ecclesiology was largely settled by the 1543 edition of the Institutes, his biblical commentaries, in this case his commentary on Acts, still have much to offer. The commentary on Acts enriches the reformer's ecclesiology in ways not possible if we only had the Institutes. The sum of Calvin and the sum of Calvinism certainly needs more than just the Institutes. Calvin's commentary on Acts has shown the dynamic of his doctrine of the church, enlivening his ecclesiology with elements not present or not as explicitly present in the Institutes. These are elements worthy of consideration in an ecclesiology of the twenty-first century.

What finally remains, is to return to the Introduction of this study. There Calvin was used by Volf and Lee as an example to show that theologians have reflected very little on how exactly 'Spirit' and 'church' are related. It is said in particular of Calvin that he "does not venture to explore how the Spirit of the triune God shapes the nature and mission of the church."³⁴ In reaction to these accusations it should firstly be affirmed that Calvin's Pneumatology is thoroughly embedded in his Christology. Christ baptizes with the Spirit, and the Spirit as Gift comes from Christ. In the book of Acts the exalted Christ acts through the Spirit. W. Krusche is correct when he says that the *proprium* of the Spirit is not his own presence but the realization of Christ.³⁵ If this is what Zizioulas means when he says that "the Holy Spirit was brought into ecclesiology *after* the edifice of the church was constructed with Christological material alone", then Calvin is guilty as charged.³⁶ However, having a Pneumatology that is

³⁴ M. Volf and M. Lee, 'The Spirit and the Church', *The Conrad Grebel Review* 18, no. 3 (2000): 20.

³⁵ W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 151; see also W. Van't Spijker, W. 'Die Lehre vom Heiligen Geist bei Bucer und Calvin', in *Calvinus Servus Christi. Die Referate des Internationalen Kongresses für Calvinforschung vom 25. Bis 28 August 1986 in Debrecen*, ed. W.H. Neuser (Budapest: Presseabteilung des Raday-Kollegiums, 1988), 76-81.

³⁶ J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 123.

determined by Christology and receiving the Spirit as a Gift from the exalted Christ, does not render the work of Spirit in ecclesiology a mere afterthought.

As has already been shown, the work of the actual restoration of the church and the kingdom is first and foremost the task of the Holy Spirit. What Christ had earned through his death and resurrection and what he will complete at his return, was to be actualized by the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, Christ was given for the fulfilment of the promise of restoration, and the restoration of all things was to be looked for at the hands of Christ alone. On the other hand, Calvin says that the church could only be restored through being renewed by the Spirit of God. After Calvin, in his commentary on Acts 2:17, speaks about the Old Testament promises of the blessed and well-ordered state of the church in the context of the restoration by Christ and the Spirit, he subsequently describes the well-ordered state of the church in his commentary on Acts 2:42. Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit, seems to have at least partially realized what shortly before was only described as a promise. The restoration of the church is accomplished by the Spirit of Christ. This he does by empowering the one body of Christ with a diversity of gifts. In fact, he is the key that opens the door for us to enter into all the treasures of spiritual blessings. He is the spring that can never run dry. He shapes and maintains the well-ordered state of the church by providing gifts to those he calls to preach and teach the Word.

Furthermore, Calvin's treatment of the phrase 'on all flesh' shows that his understanding of the nature and mission of the church is fully pneumatological. The Spirit builds a church – a body, a building, a kingdom – consisting not only of Jews, but of Jews and Gentiles in harmony and equality. Membership of the church is not determined by nationality, but by faith in Jesus Christ – although Calvin does not deny Israel its privileged position. The nature of the church is that the Spirit breaks down the walls of the ceremonies of the law and gathers all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, into the same body. And this nature of the church at the same time determines its mission – to preach the Gospel and call all to faith in Christ. This is part of the progress of the kingdom of Christ. The 'nature and mission' of the church, as Volf and Lee speak about it, is therefore fully pneumatological. The Spirit of Pentecost is responsible for all of this.

Accusing Calvin of not venturing to explore how the Spirit of the triune God shapes the nature and mission of the church seems to be at odds with his Pneumatology and ecclesiology as found in his commentary on Acts. What is true, however, is that Calvin's Pneumatology as well as his ecclesiology can never be separated from his view on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Acts is as much about the kingship of Christ as it is about the restoration work done by

the Spirit. The abundance of the Spirit and his gifts, the ministry of the apostles and the accompanying preaching, the entrance of the Gentiles in order to restore the church – all of these aspects show the Christological benefit of the book of Acts. These are all fruits of his death and resurrection. But for Calvin to think Christological means at the same time to think pneumatological. The one is not without the other. And the result is a Spirit-filled church, which had its beginning in the book of Acts, found restoration in the sixteenth-century kingdoms of Denmark and Poland, as well as in the city of Geneva, and continues into the twenty-first century. We are still in the interim in which the Spirit takes responsibility for the restoration of the church. The analogy between the book of Acts and the church of our day is therefore still possible.

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